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A

CRITICAL DISSERTATION

ON THE

POEMS OF OSSIAN,

THE

SON OF FINGAL.

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THE Subſtance of the following Diſſertation was delivered by the Author in the Courſe of his Lectures on Rhetorick and Belles-Lettres, in the Univerſity of Edinburgh. At the Deſire of ſeveral of his Hearers, he has enlarged, and given it to the Publick, in its preſent Form.

In this Diſſertation, it is propoſed, to make ſome Obſervations on the ancient Poetry of Nations, particularly the Runic and the Celtic; to point out thoſe Characters of Antiquity, which the Works of Oſſian bear; to give an Idea of the Spirit and Strain of his Poetry; and after applying the Rules of Criticiſm to Fingal, as an Epic Poem, to examine the Merit of Oſſian's Compoſitions in general, with Regard to Deſcription, Imagery, and Sentiment.

A

DISSERTATION.

NATIONS, ſmall in their beginnings and ſlow in their progreſs to maturity, cannot, with any degree of certainty, be traced to their ſource. The firſt hiſtorians, in every country, are, therefore, obſcure and unſatisfactory. Swayed by a national partiality, natural to mankind, they adopted uncertain legends and ill-fancied fictions, when they ſerved to ſtrengthen a favourite ſyſtem, or to throw luſtre on the antient ſtate of their country. Without judgment or diſcernment to ſeparate the probable and more antient traditions, from ill-digeſted tales of late invention, they jumbled the whole together, in one maſs of anachroniſms and inconſiſtencies. Their accounts, however, though deduced from æras too remote to be known, were received with that partial credulity which always diſtinguiſhes an unpoliſhed age. Mankind had neither abilities nor inclination to diſpute the truth of relations, which, by throwing luſtre on their anceſtors, flattered their own vanity.—Such were the hiſtorians of Europe, during the dark ages, which ſucceeded the ſubverſion of the Roman empire. When learning began to revive, men looked into antiquity with leſs prejudiced eyes. They choſe rather to truſt their national fame to late and well-atteſted tranſactions, than draw it from ages, dark and involved in fable.

The Romans give the firſt and, indeed, the only authentic accounts of the northern nations. Deſtitute of the uſe of letters, they themſelves had no means of tranſmitting their hiſtory to poſterity. Their traditions and ſongs were loſt, or altogether corrupted, in their revolutions and migrations, which were ſo frequent and univerſal, that no kingdom in Europe is now poſſeſſed by its original inhabitants. Societies were formed, and kingdoms erected, from a mixture of nations, who, in proceſs of time, loſt all knowlege of their own origin.

If tradition could be depended upon, it is only among a people, from all time, free of intermixture with foreigners. We are to look for theſe among the mountains and inacceſſible parts of a country: places, on account of their barrenneſs, uninviting to an enemy, or whoſe natural ſtrength enabled the natives to repel invaſions. Such are the inhabitants of the mountains of Scotland. We, accordingly, find, that they differ materially from thoſe who poſſeſs the low and more fertile part of the kingdom. Their language is pure and original, and their manners are thoſe of an antient and unmixed race of men. Conſcious of their own antiquity, they long deſpiſed others, as a new and mixed people. As they lived in a country only fit for paſture, they were free of that toil and buſineſs, which engroſs the attention of a commercial people. Their amuſement conſiſted in hearing or repeating their ſongs and traditions, and theſe intirely turned on the antiquity of their nation, and the exploits of their forefathers. It is no wonder, therefore, that there are more remains of antiquity among them, than among any other people in Europe. Traditions, however, concerning remote periods, are only to be regarded, in ſo far as they co-incide with cotemporary writers of undoubted credit and veracity.

No writers began their accounts from a more early period, than the hiſtorians of the Scotch nation. Without records, or even tradition itſelf, they give a long liſt of antient kings, and a detail of their tranſactions, with a ſcrupulous exactneſs. One might naturally ſuppoſe, that, when they had no authentic annals, they ſhould, at leaſt, have recourſe to the traditions of their country, and have reduced them into a regular ſyſtem of hiſtory. Of both they ſeem to have been equally deſtitute. Born in the low country, and ſtrangers to the antient language of their nation, they contented themſelves with copying from one another, and retailing the ſame fictions, in a new colour and dreſs.

John Fordun was the firſt who collected thoſe fragments of the Scotch hiſtory, which had eſcaped the brutal policy of Edward I. and reduced them into order. His accounts, in ſo far as they concerned recent tranſactions, deſerved credit: beyond a certain period, they were fabulous and unſatisfactory. Some time before Fordun wrote, the king of England, in a letter to the pope, had run up the antiquity of his nation to a very remote æra. Fordun, poſſeſſed of all the national prejudice of the age, was unwilling that his country ſhould yield, in point of antiquity, to a people, then its rivals and enemies. Deſtitute of annals in Scotland, he had recourſe to Ireland, which, according to the vulgar errors of the times, was reckoned the firſt habitation of the Scots. He found, there, that the Iriſh bards had carried their pretenſions to antiquity as high, if not beyond any nation in Europe. It was from them he took thoſe improbable fictions, which form the firſt part of his hiſtory.

The writers that ſucceeded Fordun implicitly followed his ſyſtem, tho' they ſometimes varied from him in their relations of particular tranſactions, and the order of ſucceſſion of their kings.

As they had no new lights, and were equally with him, unacquainted with the traditions of their country, their hiſtories contain little information concerning the origin of the Scots. Even Buchanan himſelf, except the elegance and vigour of his ſtile, has very little to recommend him. Blinded with political prejudices, he ſeemed more anxious to turn the fictions of his predeceſſors to his own purpoſes, than to detect their miſrepreſentations, or inveſtigate truth amidſt the darkneſs which they had thrown round it. It therefore appears, that little can be collected from their own hiſtorians, concerning the firſt migration of the Scots into Britain.

That this iſland was peopled from Gaul admits of no doubt. Whether colonies came afterwards from the north of Europe is a matter of mere ſpeculation. When South-Britain yielded to the power of the Romans, the unconquered nations to the north of the province were diſtinguiſhed by the name of *Caledonians*. From their very name, it appears, that they were of thoſe *Celts*, or *Gauls*, who poſſeſſed themſelves originally of Britain. It is compounded of two *Celtic* words, *Caël* ſignifying *Celts*, or *Gauls*, and *Dun* or *Don*, *a hill*; ſo that *Caël-don*, or Caledonians, is as much as to ſay, the *Celts of the hill country*. The Highlanders, to this day, call themſelves *Caël*, and their language *Caëlic*, or *Galic*. This, of itſelf, is ſufficient to demonſtrate, that they are the genuine deſcendents of the antient Caledonians, and not a pretended colony of *Scots*, who ſettled firſt in the north, in the third or fourth century.

From the double meaning of the word *Caël*, which ſignifies *ſtrangers*, as well as *Gauls*, or *Celts*, ſome have imagined, that the anceſtors of the Caledonians were of a different race from the reſt of

of the Britons, and that they received their name upon that account. This opinion, ſay they, is ſupported by Tacitus, who, from ſeveral circumſtances, concludes, that the Caledonians were of German extraction. A diſcuſſion of a point ſo intricate, at this diſtance of time, could neither be ſatisfactory nor important.

TOWARDS the latter end of the third, and beginning of the fourth century, we meet with the *Scots* in the north. Porphyrius makes the firſt mention of them about that time. As the *Scots* were not heard of before that period, moſt writers ſuppoſed them to have been a colony, newly come to Britain, and that the *Picts* were the only genuine deſcendents of the antient Caledonians. This miſtake is eaſily removed. The Caledonians, in proceſs of time, became naturally divided into two diſtinct nations, as poſſeſſing parts of the country, intirely different in their nature and ſoil. The weſtern coaſt of Scotland is hilly and barren; towards the eaſt the country is plain, and fit for tillage. The inhabitants of the mountains, a roving and uncontrouled race of men, lived by feeding of cattle, and what they killed in hunting. Their employment did not fix them to one place. They removed from one heath to another, as ſuited beſt with their convenience or inclination. They were not, therefore, improperly called, by their neighbours, SCUITE, or, *the wandering nation*; which is evidently the origin of the Roman name of *Scoti*. St. Hierom. ad Cteſiphon.

ON the other hand, the Caledonians, who poſſeſſed the eaſt coaſt of Scotland, as their diviſion of the country was plain and fertile, applied themſelves to agriculture, and raiſing of corn. It was from this, that the Galic name of the *Picts* proceeded; for they are called, in that language, *Cruithnich*, i. e. *the wheat or corn-*

eaters.

eaters. As the Picts lived in a country ſo different in its nature from that poſſeſſed by the Scots, ſo their national character ſuffered a material change. Unobſtructed by mountains, or lakes, their communication with one another was free and frequent. Society, therefore, became ſooner eſtabliſhed among them, than among the Scots, and, conſequently, they were much ſooner governed by civil magiſtrates and laws. This, at laſt, produced ſo great a difference in the manners of the two nations, that they began to forget their common origin, and almoſt continual quarrels and animoſities ſubſiſted between them. Theſe animoſities, after ſome ages, ended in the ſubverſion of the Pictiſh kingdom, but not in the total extirpation of the nation, according to moſt of the Scotch writers, who ſeemed to think it more for the honour of their countrymen to annihilate, than reduce a rival people under their obedience. It is certain, however, that the very name of the Picts was loſt, and thoſe that remained were ſo compleatly incorporated with their conquerors, that they ſoon loſt all memory of their own origin.—

The end of the Pictiſh government is placed ſo near that period, to which authentic annals reach, that it is matter of wonder, that we have no monuments of their language or hiſtory remaining. This favours the ſyſtem I have laid down. Had they originally been of a different race from the Scots, their language of courſe would be different. The contrary is the caſe. The names of places in the Pictiſh dominions, and the very names of their kings, which are handed down to us, are of Galic original, which is a convincing proof, that the two nations were, of old, one and the ſame, and only divided into two governments, by the effect which their ſituation had upon the genius of the people.

The

THE name of *Picts* was, perhaps, given by the Romans to the Caledonians, who poſſeſſed the eaſt coaſt of Scotland, from their painting their bodies. This circumſtance made ſome imagine, that the Picts were of Britiſh extract, and a different race of men from the Scots. That more of the Britons, who fled northward from the tyranny of the Romans, ſettled in the low country of Scotland, than among the Scots of the mountains, may be eaſily imagined, from the very nature of the country. It was they who introduced painting among the Picts. From this circumſtance proceeded the name of the latter, to diſtinguiſh them from the Scots, who never had that art among them, and from the Britons, who diſcontinued it after the Roman conqueſt.

THE Caledonians, moſt certainly, acquired a conſiderable knowledge in navigation, by their living on a coaſt interſected with many arms of the ſea, and, in iſlands, divided, one from another, by wide and dangerous firths. It is, therefore, highly probable, that they, very early, found their way to the north of Ireland, which is within ſight of their own country. That Ireland was firſt peopled from Britain is certain. The vicinity of the two iſlands; the exact correſpondence of the antient inhabitants of both, in point of manners and language, are ſufficient proofs, even if we had not the teſtimony of authors of undoubted veracity to confirm it. The abettors of the moſt romantic ſyſtems of Iriſh antiquities allow it; but they place the colony from Britain in an improbable and remote æra. I ſhall eaſily admit, that the colony of the *Firbolg*, confeſſedly the *Belgæ* of Britain, ſettled in the ſouth of Ireland, before the *Caël*, or Caledonians, diſcovered the north: but it is not at all likely, that the migration of the Firbolg to Ireland happened many centuries before the incarnation. Dio. Sic. l. 5.

OSSIAN

Temora, Book II.

OSSIAN, in the poem of Temora, throws conſiderable light on this ſubject. His accounts agree ſo well with what the antients have delivered, concerning the firſt population and inhabitants of Ireland, that every unbiaſſed perſon will confeſs them more probable, than the legends handed down, by tradition, in that country. From him, it appears, that, in the days of Trathal, grandfather to Fingal, Ireland was poſſeſſed by two nations; the *Firbolg* or *Belgæ* of Britain, who inhabited the ſouth, and the *Caël*, who paſſed over from Caledonia and the Hebrides to Ulſter. The two nations, as is uſual among an unpoliſhed and lately ſettled people, were divided into ſmall dynaſties, ſubject to petty kings, or chiefs, independent of one another. In this ſituation, it is probable, they continued long, without any material revolution in the ſtate of the iſland, until Crothar, Lord of Atha, a country in Connaught, the moſt potent chief of the *Firbolg*, carried away Conlama, the daughter of Cathmin, a chief of the *Cael*, who poſſeſſed Ulſter.

CONLAMA had been betrothed, ſome time before, to Turloch, a chief of her own nation. Turloch reſented the affront offered him by Crothar, made an irruption into Connaught, and killed Cormul, the brother of Crothar, who came to oppoſe his progreſs. Crothar himſelf then took arms, and either killed or expelled Turloch. The war, upon this, became general, between the two nations: and the Caël were reduced to the laſt extremity.—In this ſituation, they applied, for aid, to Trathal king of Morven, who ſent his brother Conar, already famous for his great exploits, to their relief. Conar, upon his arrival in Ulſter, was choſen king, by the unanimous conſent of the Caledonian tribes, who poſſeſſed that country. The war was renewed with vigour and ſucceſs; but the *Firbolg* appear to have been rather repelled than ſubdued. In ſuc-

ceeding

ceeding reigns, we learn from epiſodes in the ſame poem, that the chiefs of Atha made ſeveral efforts to become monarchs of Ireland, and to expel the race of Conar.

To Conar ſucceeded his ſon Cormac, who appears to have reigned long. In his latter days he ſeems to have been driven to the laſt extremity, by an inſurrection of the *Firbolg*, who ſupported the pretenſions of the chiefs of Atha to the Iriſh throne. Fingal, who then was very young, came to the aid of Cormac, totally defeated Colc-ulla, chief of Atha, and re-eſtabliſhed Cormac in the ſole poſſeſſion of all Ireland. It was then he fell in love with, and took to wife, Ros-crana, the daughter of Cormac, who was the mother of Oſſian. Book III. Book IV.

Cormac was ſucceeded in the Iriſh throne by his ſon, Cairbre; Cairbre by Artho, his Son, who was the father of that Cormac, in whoſe minority the invaſion of Swaran happened, which is the ſubject of the poem of *Fingal*. The family of Atha, who had not relinquiſhed their pretenſions to the Iriſh throne, rebelled in the minority of Cormac, defeated his adherents, and murdered him in the palace of Temora. Cairbar, lord of Atha, upon this, mounted the throne. His uſurpation ſoon ended with his life; for Fingal made an expedition into Ireland, and reſtored, after various viciſſitudes of fortune, the family of Conar to the poſſeſſion of the kingdom. This war is the ſubject of Temora; the events, tho' certainly heightened and embelliſhed by poetry, ſeem, notwithſtanding, to have their foundation in true hiſtory. Book I.

Ossian has not only preſerved the hiſtory of the firſt migration of the Caledonians into Ireland, he has alſo delivered ſome impor-

tant facts, concerning the firſt ſettlement of the *Firbolg*, or *Belgæ of Britain*, in that kingdom, under their leader Larthon, who was anceſtor to Cairbar and Cathmor, who, ſucceſſively, mounted the Iriſh throne, after the death of Cormac, the ſon of Artho. I forbear to tranſcribe the paſſage, on account of its length. It is the ſong of Fonar, the bard; towards the latter end of the ſeventh book of Temora. As the generations from Larthon to Cathmor, to whom the epiſode is addreſſed, are not marked, as are thoſe of the family of Conar, the firſt king of Ireland, we can form no judgment of the time of the ſettlement of the Firbolg. It is, however, probable, it was ſome time before the *Caël*, or Caledonians, ſettled in Ulſter.—One important fact may be gathered from this hiſtory of Oſſian, that the Iriſh had no king before the latter end of the firſt century. Fingal lived, it is certain, in the third century; ſo Conar, the firſt monarch of the Iriſh, who was his grand-uncle, cannot be placed farther back than the cloſe of the firſt. The eſtabliſhing of this fact, lays, at once, aſide the pretended antiquities of the Scotch and Iriſh, and cuts off the long liſt of kings which the latter give us for a millennium before.

Book VII.

Of the affairs of Scotland, it is certain, nothing can be depended upon, prior to the reign of Fergus, the ſon of Erc, who lived in the fifth century. The true hiſtory of Ireland begins ſomewhat later than that period. Sir James Ware, who was indefatigable in his reſearches after the antiquities of his country, rejects, as mere fiction and idle romance, all that is related of the antient Iriſh, before the time of St. Patrick, and the reign of Leogaire. It is from this conſideration, that he begins his hiſtory at the introduction of chriſtianity, remarking, that all that is delivered down, concerning the times of paganiſm, were tales of late invention, ſtrangely

War. de antiq. Hybern. præ. p. 1.

ſtrangely mixed with anachroniſms and inconſiſtencies. Such being the opinion of Ware, who had collected, with uncommon induſtry and zeal, all the real and pretendedly antient manuſcripts, concerning the hiſtory of his country, we may, on his authority, reject the improbable and ſelf-condemned tales of Keating and O'Flaherty. Credulous and puerile to the laſt degree, they have diſgraced the antiquities they meant to eſtabliſh. It is to be wiſhed, that ſome able Iriſhman, who underſtands the language and records of his country, may redeem, ere it is too late, the genuine antiquities of Ireland, from the hands of theſe idle fabuliſts.

By comparing the hiſtory preſerved by Oſſian with the legends of the Scotch and Iriſh writers, and, by afterwards examining both by the teſt of the Roman authors, it is eaſy to diſcover which is the moſt probable. Probability is all that can be eſtabliſhed on the authority of tradition, ever dubious and uncertain. But when it favours the hypotheſis laid down by cotemporary writers of undoubted veracity, and, as it were, finiſhes the figure of which they only drew the out-lines, it ought, in the judgment of ſober reaſon, to be preferred to accounts framed in dark and diſtant periods, with little judgment, and upon no authority.

Concerning the period of more than a century, which intervenes between Fingal and the reign of Fergus, the ſon of Erc or Arcath, tradition is dark and contradictory. Some trace up the family of Fergus to a ſon of Fingal of that name, who makes a conſiderable figure in Oſſian's poems. The three elder ſons of Fingal, Oſſian, Fillan, and Ryno, dying, without iſſue, the ſucceſſion, of courſe, devolved upon Fergus, the fourth ſon and his poſterity. This Fergus, ſay ſome traditions, was the father of Congal, whoſe

ſon was Arcath, the father of Fergus, properly called the firſt king of Scots, as it was in his time the *Caël*, who poſſeſſed the weſtern coaſt of Scotland, began to be diſtinguiſhed, by foreigners, by the name of *Scots*. From thence forward, the Scots and Picts, as diſtinct nations, became objects of attention to the hiſtorians of other countries. The internal ſtate of the two Caledonian kingdoms has always continued, and ever muſt remain, in obſcurity and fable.

It is in this epoch we muſt fix the beginning of the decay of that ſpecies of heroiſm, which ſubſiſted in the days of Oſſian. There are three ſtages in human ſociety. The firſt is the reſult of conſanguinity, and the natural affection of the members of a family to one another. The ſecond begins when property is eſtabliſhed, and men enter into aſſociations for mutual defence, againſt the invaſions and injuſtice of neighbours. Mankind ſubmit, in the third, to certain laws and ſubordinations of government, to which they truſt the ſafety of their perſons and property. As the firſt is formed on nature, ſo, of courſe, it is the moſt diſintereſted and noble. Men, in the laſt, have leiſure to cultivate the mind, and to reſtore it, with reflection, to a primæval dignity of ſentiment. The middle ſtate is the region of compleat barbariſm and ignorance. About the beginning of the fifth century, the Scots and Picts were advanced into the ſecond ſtage, and, conſequently, into thoſe circumſcribed ſentiments, which always diſtinguiſh barbarity.—The events which ſoon after happened did not at all contribute to enlarge their ideas, or mend their national character.

About the year 426, the Romans, on account of domeſtic commotions, entirely forſook Britain, finding it impoſſible to defend ſo diſtant a frontier. The Picts and Scots, ſeizing this favourable

vourable opportunity, made incurſions into the deſerted province. The Britons, enervated by the ſlavery of ſeveral centuries, and thoſe vices, which are inſeparable from an advanced ſtate of civility, were not able to withſtand the impetuous, tho' irregular attacks of a barbarous enemy. In the utmoſt diſtreſs, they applied to their old maſters, the Romans, and (after the unfortunate ſtate of the Empire could not ſpare aid) to the Saxons, a nation equally barbarous and brave, with the enemies of whom they were ſo much afraid. Tho' the bravery of the Saxons repelled the Caledonian nations for a time, yet the latter found means to extend themſelves, conſiderably, towards the South. It is, in this period, we muſt place the origin of the arts of civil life among the Scots. The ſeat of government was removed from the mountains to the plain and more fertile provinces of the South, to be near the common enemy, in caſe of ſudden incurſions. Inſtead of roving thro' unfrequented wilds, in ſearch of ſubſiſtance, by means of hunting, men applied to agriculture, and raiſing of corn. This manner of life was the firſt means of changing the national character.—The next thing which contributed to it was their mixture with ſtrangers.

In the countries which the Scots had conquered from the Britons, it is probable the moſt of the old inhabitants remained. Theſe, incorporating with the conquerors, taught them agriculture, and other arts, which they themſelves had received from the Romans. The Scots, however, in number as well as power, being the moſt predominant, retained ſtill their language, and as many of the cuſtoms of their anceſtors, as ſuited with the nature of the country they poſſeſſed. Even the union of the two Caledonian kingdoms did not much affect the national character. Being originally deſcended from the ſame ſtock, the manners of the Picts and

Scots

Scots were as ſimilar as the different natures of the countries they poſſeſſed permitted.

What brought about a total change in the genius of the Scots nation, was their wars, and other tranſactions with the Saxons. Several counties in the ſouth of Scotland were alternately poſſeſſed by the two nations. They were ceded, in the ninth age, to the Scots, and, it is probable, that moſt of the Saxon inhabitants remained in poſſeſſion of their lands. During the ſeveral conqueſts and revolutions in England, many fled, for refuge, into Scotland, to avoid the oppreſſion of foreigners, or the tyranny of domeſtic uſurpers; in ſo much, that the Saxon race formed perhaps near one half of the Scottiſh kingdom. The Saxon manners and language daily gained ground, on the tongue and cuſtoms of the antient Caledonians, till, at laſt, the latter were entirely relegated to inhabitants of the mountains, who were ſtill unmixed with ſtrangers.

It was after the acceſſion of territory which the Scots received, upon the retreat of the Romans from Britain, that the inhabitants of the Highlands were divided into clans. The king, when he kept his court in the mountains, was conſidered, by the whole nation, as the chief of their blood. Their ſmall number, as well as the preſence of their prince, prevented thoſe diviſions, which, afterwards, ſprung forth into ſo many ſeparate tribes. When the ſeat of government was removed to the ſouth, thoſe who remained in the Highlands were, of courſe, neglected. They naturally formed themſelves into ſmall ſocieties, independent of one another. Each ſociety had its own *regulus*, who either was, or, in the ſucceſſion of a few generations, was regarded as chief of their blood. —The nature of the country favoured an inſtitution of this ſort.

A few

A few valleys, divided from one another by extenſive heaths and impaſſible mountains, form the face of the Highlands. In theſe valleys the chiefs fixed their reſidence. Round them, and almoſt within ſight of their dwellings, were the habitations of their relations and dependents.

The ſeats of the Highland chiefs were neither diſagreeable nor inconvenient. Surrounded with mountains and hanging woods, they were covered from the inclemency of the weather. Near them generally ran a pretty large river, which, diſcharging itſelf, not far off, into an arm of the ſea, or extenſive lake, ſwarmed with variety of fiſh. The woods were ſtocked with wild-fowl; and the heaths and mountains behind them were the natural ſeat of the red-deer and roe. If we make allowance for the backward ſtate of agriculture, the valleys were not unfertile; affording, if not all the conveniences, at leaſt the neceſſaries of life. Here the chief lived, the ſupreme judge and law-giver of his own people; but his ſway was neither ſevere nor unjuſt. As the populace regarded him as the chief of their blood, ſo he, in return, conſidered them as members of his family. His commands, therefore, tho' abſolute and deciſive, partook more of the authority of a father, than of the rigor of a judge.—Tho' the whole territory of the tribe was conſidered as the property of the chief, yet his vaſſals made him no other conſideration for their lands than ſervices, neither burdenſome nor frequent. As he ſeldom went from home, he was at no expence. His table was ſupplied by his own herds, and what his numerous attendants killed in hunting.

In this rural kind of magnificence, the Highland chiefs lived, for many ages. At a diſtance from the ſeat of government, and ſecured,

cured, by the inacceſſibleneſs of their country, they were free and independent. As they had little communication with ſtrangers, the cuſtoms of their anceſtors remained among them, and their language retained its original purity. Naturally fond of military fame, and remarkably attached to the memory of their anceſtors, they delighted in traditions and ſongs, concerning the exploits of their nation, and eſpecially of their own particular families. A ſucceſſion of bards was retained in every clan, to hand down the memorable actions of their foreſathers. As the æra of Fingal, on account of Oſſian's poems, was the moſt remarkable, and his chiefs the moſt renowned names in tradition, the bards took care to place one of them in the genealogy of every great family.—That part of the poems, which concerned the hero who was regarded as anceſtor, was preſerved, as an authentic record of the antiquity of the family, and was delivered down, from race to race, with wonderful exactneſs.

The bards themſelves, in the mean time, were not idle. They erected their immediate patrons into heroes, and celebrated them in their ſongs. As the circle of their knowledge was narrow, their ideas were confined in proportion. A few happy expreſſions, and the manners they repreſent, may pleaſe thoſe who underſtand the language; their obſcurity and innacuracy would diſguſt in a tranſlation.—It was chiefly, for this reaſon, that I kept wholly to the compoſitions of Oſſian, in my former and preſent publication. As he acted in a more extenſive ſphere, his ideas are more noble and univerſal; neither has he ſo many of thoſe peculiarities, which are only underſtood in a certain period or country. The other bards have their beauties, but not in that ſpecies of compoſition in which Oſſian excels. Their rhimes, only calculated to kindle a martial

ſpirit

ſpirit among the vulgar, afford very little pleaſure to genuine taſte. This obſervation only regards their poems of the heroic kind; in every other ſpecies of poetry they are more ſucceſsful. They expreſs the tender melancholy of deſponding love, with irreſiſtible ſimplicity and nature. So well adapted are the ſounds of the words to the ſentiments, that, even without any knowledge of the language, they pierce and diſſolve the heart. Succeſsful love is expreſſed with peculiar tenderneſs and elegance. In all their compoſitions, except the heroic, which was ſolely calculated to animate the vulgar, they give us the genuine language of the heart, without any of thoſe affected ornaments of phraſeology, which, tho' intended to beautify ſentiments, diveſt them of their natural force. The ideas, it is confeſſed, are too local, to be admired, in another language; to thoſe, who are acquainted with the manners they repreſent, and the ſcenes they deſcribe, they muſt afford the higheſt pleaſure and ſatisfaction.

It was the locality of his deſcription and ſentiment, that, probably, kept Oſſian ſo long in the obſcurity of an almoſt loſt language. His ideas, tho' remarkably proper for the times in which he lived, are ſo contrary to the preſent advanced ſtate of ſociety, that more than a common mediocrity of taſte is required, to reliſh his poems as they deſerve.—Thoſe who alone were capable to make a tranſlation were, no doubt, conſcious of this, and choſe rather to admire their poet in ſecret, than ſee him received, with coldneſs, in an Engliſh dreſs.

These were long my own ſentiments, and, accordingly, my firſt tranſlations, from the Galic, were merely accidental. The publication, which ſoon after followed, was ſo well received, that I was

obliged to promiſe to my friends a larger collection. In a journey thro' the Highlands and iſles, and, by the aſſiſtance of correſpondents, ſince I left that country, all the genuine remains of the works of Oſſian have come to my hands. In the publication of laſt year compleat poems were only given. Unfiniſhed and imperfect poems were purpoſely omitted; even ſome pieces were rejected, on account of their length, and others, that they might not break in upon that thread of connection, which ſubſiſts in the leſſer compoſitions, ſubjoined to *Fingal*.—That the comparative merit of pieces was not regarded, in the ſelection, will readily appear to thoſe who ſhall read, attentively, the preſent collection.—It is animated with the ſame ſpirit of poetry, and the ſame ſtrength of ſentiment is ſuſtained throughout.

The opening of the poem of Temora made its appearance in the laſt collection. The ſecond book, and ſeveral other epiſodes, have only fallen into my hands lately. The ſtory of the poem, with which I had been long acquainted, enabled me to reduce the broken members of the piece into the order in which they now appear. For the eaſe of the reader, I have divided it myſelf into books, as I had done before with the poem of *Fingal*. As to the merit of the poem I ſhall not anticipate the judgment of the public. My impartiality might be ſuſpected, in my accounts of a work, which, in ſome meaſure, is become my own. If the poem of Fingal met with the applauſe of perſons of genuine taſte, I ſhould alſo hope, that Temora will not diſpleaſe them.

But what renders Temora infinitely more valuable than Fingal, is the light it throws on the hiſtory of the times. The firſt population of Ireland, its firſt kings, and ſeveral circumſtances, which regard

regard its connection of old with the ſouth and north of Britain, are preſented to us, in ſeveral epiſodes. The ſubject and cataſtrophe of the poem are founded upon facts, which regarded the firſt peopling of that country, and the conteſts between the two Britiſh nations, which originally inhabited it.—In a preceding part of this diſſertation, I have ſhewn how ſuperior the probability of Oſſian's traditions is to the undigeſted fictions of the Iriſh bards, and the more recent and regular legends of both Iriſh and Scotch hiſtorians. I mean not to give offence to the abettors of the high antiquities of the two nations, tho' I have all along expreſſed my doubts, concerning the veracity and abilities of thoſe who deliver down their antient hiſtory. For my own part, I prefer the national fame, ariſing from a few certain facts, to the legendary and uncertain annals of ages of remote and obſcure antiquity. No kingdom, now eſtabliſhed in Europe, can pretend to equal antiquity with thoſe of Ireland and Scotland, even according to my ſyſtem, ſo that it is altogether needleſs to fix their origin a fictitious millennium before. This ſubject I have only lightly touched upon, as it is to be diſcuſſed, with more perſpicuity, and at a much greater length, by a gentleman, who has thoroughly examined the antiquities of Britain and Ireland.

Since the publication of the laſt collection of Oſſian's poems, many inſinuations have been made, and doubts ariſen, concerning their authenticity. I ſhall, probably, hear more of the ſame kind after the preſent poems ſhall make their appearance. Whether theſe ſuſpicions are ſuggeſted by prejudice, or are only the effects of ignorance of facts, I ſhall not pretend to determine.—To me they give no concern, as I have it always in my power to remove them. An incredulity of this kind is natural to perſons, who confine all

merit to their own age and country. Theſe are generally the weakeſt, as well as the moſt ignorant, of the people. Indolently confined to a place, their ideas are narrow and circumſcribed.—It is ridiculous enough to ſee ſuch people as theſe are, branding their anceſtors, with the deſpicable appellation of barbarians. Sober reaſon can eaſily diſcern, where the title ought to be fixed, with more propriety.

As prejudice is always the effect of ignorance, the knowing, the men of true taſte, deſpiſe and diſmiſs it. If the poetry is good, and the characters natural and ſtriking, to them it is a matter of indifference, whether the heroes were born in the little village of Angles in Juteland, or natives of the barren heaths of Caledonia. That honour which nations derive from anceſtors, worthy, or renowned, is merely ideal. It may buoy up the minds of individuals, but it contributes very little to their importance in the eyes of others.—But of all thoſe prejudices which are incident to narrow minds, that which meaſures the merit of performances by the vulgar opinion, concerning the country which produced them, is certainly the moſt ridiculous. Ridiculous, however, as it is, few have the courage to reject it; and, I am thoroughly convinced, that a few quaint lines of a Roman or Greek epigrammatiſt, if dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum, would meet with more cordial and univerſal applauſe, than all the moſt beautiful and natural rhapſodies of all the Celtic bards and Scandinavian Scalders that ever exiſted.

While ſome doubt the authenticity of the compoſitions of Oſſian, others ſtrenuouſly endeavour to appropriate them to the Iriſh nation. Tho' the whole tenor of the poems ſufficiently contradict ſo abſurd an opinion, it may not be improper, for the ſatisfaction of ſome, to examine the narrow foundation, on which this extraordinary claim is built.

Of

Of all the nations deſcended from the antient *Celtæ*, the Scots and Iriſh are the moſt ſimilar in language, cuſtoms, and manners. This argues a more intimate connection between them, than a remote deſcent from the great Celtic ſtock. It is evident, in ſhort, that, at ſome one period or other, they formed one ſociety, were ſubject to the ſame government, and were, in all reſpects, one and the ſame people. How they became divided, which the colony, or which the mother nation, does not fall now to be diſcuſſed. The firſt circumſtance that induced me to diſregard the vulgarly-received opinion of the Hibernian extraction of the Scotch nation, was my obſervations on their antient language. That dialect of the Celtic tongue, ſpoken in the north of Scotland, is much more pure, more agreeable to its mother language, and more abounding with primitives, than that now ſpoken, or even that which has been writ for ſome centuries back, amongſt the moſt unmixed part of the Iriſh nation. A Scotchman, tolerably converſant in his own language, underſtands an Iriſh compoſition, from that derivative analogy which it has to the *Galic* of North-Britain. An Iriſhman, on the other hand, without the aid of ſtudy, can never underſtand a compoſition in the *Galic* tongue.—This affords a proof, that the *Scotch Galic* is the moſt original, and, conſequently, the language of a more antient and unmixed people. The Iriſh, however backward they may be to allow any thing to the prejudice of their antiquity, ſeem inadvertently to acknowledge it, by the very appellation they give to the dialect they ſpeak.—They call their own language *Caëlic Eirinach*, i. e. *Caledonian Iriſh*, when, on the contrary, they call the dialect of North-Britain *a Chaëlic*, or the *Caledonian tongue*, emphatically. A circumſtance of this nature tends more to decide which is the moſt antient nation, than the united

teſtimonies

teſtimonies of a whole legion of ignorant bards and ſenachies, who, perhaps, never dreamed of bringing the Scots from Spain to Ireland, till ſome one of them, more learned than the reſt, diſcovered, that the Romans called the firſt *Iberia*, and the latter *Hibernia*. On ſuch a ſlight foundation were probably built thoſe romantic fictions, concerning the Mileſians of Ireland.

FROM internal proofs it ſufficiently appears, that the poems publiſhed under the name of Oſſian, are not of Iriſh compoſition. The favourite chimæra, that Ireland is the mother-country of the Scots, is totally ſubverted and ruined. The fictions, concerning the antiquities of that country, which were forming for ages, and growing, as they came down, on the hands of ſucceſſive *ſenachies* and *ſileas*, are found, at laſt, to be the ſpurious brood of modern and ignorant ages. To thoſe who know how tenacious the Iriſh are, of their pretended *Iberian* deſcent, this alone is proof ſufficient, that poems, ſo ſubverſive of their ſyſtem, could never be produced by an Hibernian bard.—But when we look to the language, it is ſo different from the Iriſh dialect, that it would be as ridiculous to think, that Milton's Paradiſe Loſt could be wrote by a Scotch peaſant, as to ſuppoſe, that the poems aſcribed to Oſſian were writ in Ireland.

THE pretenſions of Ireland to Oſſian proceed from another quarter. There are handed down, in that country, traditional poems, concerning the *Fiona*, or the heroes of *Fion Mac Comnal*. This *Fion*, ſay the Iriſh annaliſts, was general of the militia of Ireland, in the reign of Cormac, in the third century. Where Keating and O'Flaherty learned, that Ireland had an *embodied* militia ſo early, is not eaſy for me to determine. Their information certainly did not

come from the Iriſh poems, concerning *Fion*. I have juſt now, in my hands, all that remain, of thoſe compoſitions; but, unluckily for the antiquities of Ireland, they appear to be the work of a very modern period. Every ſtanza, nay almoſt every line, affords ſtriking proofs, that they cannot be three centuries old. Their alluſions to the manners and cuſtoms of the fifteenth century, are ſo many, that it is matter of wonder to me, how any one could dream of their antiquity. They are entirely writ in that romantic taſte, which prevailed two ages ago.—Giants, enchanted caſtles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches and magicians form the whole circle of the poet's invention. The celebrated *Fion* could ſcarcely move from one hillock to another, without encountering a giant, or being entangled in the circles of a magician. Witches, on broomſticks, were continually hovering round him, like crows; and he had freed enchanted virgins in every valley in Ireland. In ſhort, *Fion*, great as he was, had but a bad ſort of life of it.—Not only had he to engage all the miſchiefs in his own country, foreign armies invaded him, aſſiſted by magicians and witches, and headed by kings, as tall as the main-maſt of a firſt rate.—It muſt be owned, however, that *Fion* was not inferior to them in height.

A chos air *Cromleach*, druim-ard,
Chos eile air Crom-meal dubh,
Thoga *Fion* le lamh mhoir
An d'uiſge o *Lubhair* na ſruth.

"*Fion*, ſays the Iriſh bard, ſometimes placed one foot on the mountain *Cromleach*, his other foot on the hill of *Crommal*, and, in that poſition, waſhed his hands, in the river *Lubar*, which ran thro' the intermediate valley." The property of ſuch a monſter as this *Fion*,

I ſhould

I ſhould never have diſputed with any nation. But the bard himſelf, in the poem, from which the above quotation is taken, cedes him to Scotland.

FION O ALBIN, ſiol nan laoich.

FION *from* ALBION, *race of heroes!*

Were it allowable to contradict the authority of a bard, at this diſtance of time, I ſhould have given, as my opinion, that this enormous *Fion* was of the race of the Hibernian giants, of Ruanus, or ſome other celebrated name, rather than a native of Caledonia, whoſe inhabitants, now at leaſt, are not remarkable for their ſtature.

IF *Fion* was ſo remarkable for his ſtature, his heroes had alſo other extraordinary properties. *In weight all the ſons of ſtrangers* yielded to the celebrated Ton-ioſal; and for hardneſs of ſkull, and, perhaps, for thickneſs too, the valiant Oſcar ſtood *unrivalled and alone*. Oſſian himſelf had many ſingular and leſs delicate qualifications, than playing on the harp; and the brave Cuchullin was of ſo diminutive a ſize, as to be taken for a child of two years of age, by the gigantic Swaran. To illuſtrate this ſubject, I ſhall here lay before the reader, the hiſtory of ſome of the Iriſh poems, concerning *Fion Mac Comnal*. A tranſlation of theſe pieces, if well executed, might afford ſatisfaction to the public. But this ought to be the work of a native of Ireland. To draw forth, from obſcurity, the poems of my own country, has afforded ample employment to me; beſides, I am too diffident of my own abilities, to undertake ſuch a work. A gentleman in Dublin accuſed me to the public, of committing blunders and abſurdities, in tranſlating the language of my

own

own country, and that before any tranſlation of mine appeared *. How the gentleman came to ſee my blunders before I committed them, is not eaſy to determine; if he did not conclude, that, as a Scotſman, and, of courſe, deſcended of the Mileſian race, I might have committed ſome of thoſe overſights, which, perhaps very unjuſtly, are ſaid to be peculiar to them.

From the whole tenor of the Iriſh poems, concerning the *Fiona*, it appears, that *Fion Mac Comnal* flouriſhed in the reign of Cormac, which is placed, by the univerſal conſent of the ſenachies, in the third century. They even fix the death of Fingal in the year 286, yet his ſon Oſſian is made cotemporary with St. Patrick, who preached the goſpel in Ireland about the middle of the fifth age. Oſſian, tho', at that time, he muſt have been two hundred and fifty years of age, had a daughter young enough to become wife to the ſaint. On account of this family connection, *Patrick of the Pſalms*, for ſo the apoſtle of Ireland is emphatically called in the poems, took great delight in the company of Oſſian, and in hearing

* In Faulkner's Dublin Journal, of the 1ſt December, 1761, appeared the following Advertiſement:

Speedily will be publiſhed, by a Gentleman of this kingdom, who hath been, for ſome time paſt, employed in tranſlating and writing Hiſtorical Notes to

FINGAL, A Poem,

Originally wrote in the Iriſh or Erſe language. In the preface to which, the tranſlator, who is a perfect maſter of the Iriſh tongue, will give an account of the manners and cuſtoms of the antient Iriſh or Scotch; and, therefore, moſt humbly intreats the public, to wait for his edition, which will appear in a ſhort time, as he will ſet forth all the blunders and abſurdities in the edition now-printing in London, and ſhew the ignorance of the Engliſh tranſlator, in his knowlege of Iriſh grammar, not underſtanding any part of that accidence.

the great actions of his family. The ſaint ſometimes threw off the auſterity of his profeſſion, drunk freely, and had his ſoul properly warmed with wine, in order to hear, with becoming enthuſiaſm, the poems of his father-in-law. One of the poems begins with this piece of uſeful information.

Lo don rabh PADRIC na mhúr,
Gun *Sailm* air uidh, ach a gól,
Ghluais é thigh *Oſſian* mhic *Fhion*,
O ſan leis bu bhinn a ghloir.

The title of this poem is, *Teantach mor na Fiona*. It appears to have been founded on the ſame ſtory with the *battle of Lora*, one of the poems of the genuine Oſſian. The circumſtances and cataſtrophe in both are much the ſame; but the *Iriſh Oſſian* diſcovers the age in which he lived, by an unlucky anachroniſm. After deſcribing the total route of Erragon, he very gravely concludes with this remarkable anecdote, that none of the foe eſcaped, but a few, who were allowed to go on a pilgrimage to the *Holy Land*. This circumſtance fixes the date of the compoſition of the piece ſome centuries after the famous croiſade; for, it is evident, that the poet thought the time of the croiſade ſo antient, that he confounds it with the age of Fingal.—Erragon, in the courſe of this poem, is often called,

Riogh *Lochlin* an do ſhloigh,
King of Denmark of two nations,

which alludes to the union of the kingdoms of Norway and Denmark, a circumſtance which brings down the date of the piece to an

an æra, not far remote. Modern, however, as this pretended Oſſian was, it is certain, he lived before the Iriſh had dreamed of appropriating *Fion*, or *Fingal*, to themſelves. He concludes the poem, with this reflection:

Na fagha ſe comhthróm nan n' arm,
Eragon Mac Annir nan lánn glas
'San n' ALBIN ni n' abairtair Triath
Agus ghlaoite an n' *Fhiona* as.

"Had Erragon, ſon of Annir of gleaming ſwords, avoided the equal conteſt of arms (ſingle combat) no chief ſhould have afterwards been numbered in ALBION, and the heroes of Fion ſhould no more be named."

THE next poem that falls under our obſervation is *Cath-cabhra*, or, *The death of Oſcar*. This piece is founded on the ſame ſtory which we have in the firſt book of Temora. So little thought the author of *Cath-cabhra* of making Oſcar his countryman, that, in the courſe of two hundred lines, of which the poem conſiſts, he puts the following expreſſion thrice in the mouth of the hero:

ALBIN an ſa d' roina m' arach.——
ALBION *where I was born and bred.*

The poem contains almoſt all the incidents in the firſt book of Temora. In one circumſtance the bard differs materially from Oſſian. Oſcar, after he was mortally wounded by Cairbar, was carried by his people to a neighbouring hill, which commanded a proſpect of

the ſea. A fleet appeared at a diſtance, and the hero exclaims with joy,

Loingeas mo ſhean-athair at' án
'S iad a tiächd le cabhair chugain,
O ALBIN na n' ioma ſtuagh.

" It is the fleet of my grandfather, coming with aid to our field, from ALBION of many waves!"——The teſtimony of this bard is ſufficient to confute the idle fictions of Keating and O'Flaherty; for, tho' he is far from being antient, it is probable, he flouriſhed a full century before theſe hiſtorians.—He appears, however, to have been a much better chriſtian than chronologer; for *Fion*, tho' he is placed two centuries before St. Patrick, very devoutly recommends the ſoul of his grandſon to his Redeemer.

Duan a Gharibh Mac-Starn is another Iriſh poem in high repute. The grandeur of its images, and its propriety of ſentiment, might have induced me to give a tranſlation of it, had not I ſome expectations of ſeeing it in the collection of the Iriſh Oſſian's poems, promiſed, more than a year ſince, to the public. The author deſcends ſometimes from the region of the ſublime to low and indecent deſcription; the laſt of which, the Iriſh tranſlator, no doubt, will chooſe to leave in the obſcurity of the original.—In this piece Cuchullin is uſed with very little ceremony, for he is oft called, the *dog of Tara*, in the county of Meath. This ſevere title of the *redoubtable Cuchullin*, the moſt renowned of Iriſh champions, proceeded from the poet's ignorance of etymology. Cu, *voice*, or *commander*, ſignifies alſo a *dog*. The poet choſe the laſt, as the moſt noble appellation for his hero.

THE

THE ſubject of the poem is the ſame with that of the epic poem of Fingal. *Garibh Mac-Starn* is the ſame with Oſſian's Swaran, the ſon of Starno. His ſingle combats with, and his victory over all the heroes of Ireland, excepting the *celebrated dog of Tara*, i. e. Cuchullin, afford matter for two hundred lines of tolerable poetry. *Garibh*'s progreſs in ſearch of Cuchullin, and his intrigue with the gigantic Emir-bragal, that hero's wife, enables the poet to extend his piece to four hundred lines. This author, it is true, makes Cuchullin a native of Ireland; the gigantic Emir-bragal he calls, *the guiding ſtar of the women of Ireland.* The property of this enormous lady I ſhall not diſpute with him, or any other. But, as he ſpeaks with great tenderneſs of the *daughters of the convent*, and throws out ſome hints againſt the Engliſh nation, it is probable he lived in too modern a period to be intimately acquainted with the genealogy of Cuchullin.

ANOTHER Iriſh Oſſian (for there were many, as appears from their difference in language and ſentiment) ſpeaks very dogmatically of *Fion Mac Còmnal*, as an Iriſhman. Little can be ſaid for the judgment of this poet, and leſs for his delicacy of ſentiment. The hiſtory of one of his epiſodes may, at once, ſtand as a ſpecimen of his want of both. Ireland, in the days of *Fion*, happened to be threatned with an invaſion, by three great potentates, the kings of Lochlin, Sweden, and France. It is needleſs to inſiſt upon the impropriety of a French invaſion of Ireland; it is ſufficient for me to be faithful to the language of my author. *Fion*, upon receiving intelligence of the intended invaſion, ſent Ca-olt, Oſſian, and Oſcar, to watch the bay, in which, it was apprehended, the enemy was to land. Oſcar was the worſt choice of a ſcout that could be made, for, brave as he was, he had the bad property of falling very often aſleep on his poſt, nor was it poſſible to awake

him, without cutting off one of his fingers, or daſhing a large ſtone againſt his head. When the enemy appeared, Oſcar, very unfortunately, was aſleep. Oſſian and Ca-olt conſulted about the method of wakening him, and they, at laſt, fixed on the ſtone, as the leſs dangerous expedient.

Gun thog Caoilte a chlach, nach gán,
Agus a n' aighai' chiean gun bhuail;
Tri mil an tulloch gun chri', &c.

" Ca-olt took up a heavy ſtone, and ſtruck it againſt the hero's head. The hill ſhook for three miles, as the ſtone rebounded and rolled away." Oſcar roſe in wrath, and his father gravely deſired him to ſpend his rage on his enemies, which he did to ſo good purpoſe, that he ſingly routed a whole wing of their army. The confederate kings advanced, notwithſtanding, till they came to a narrow paſs, poſſeſſed by the celebrated Ton-ioſal. This name is very ſignificant of the ſingular property of the hero who bore it. Ton-ioſal, tho' brave, was ſo heavy and unwieldy, that, when he ſat down, it took the whole force of an hundred men to ſet him upright on his feet again. Luckily for the preſervation of Ireland, the hero happened to be ſtanding when the enemy appeared, and he gave ſo good an account of them, that *Fion*, upon his arrival, found little to do, but to divide the ſpoil among his ſoldiers.

All theſe extraordinary heroes, Fion, Oſſian, Oſcar and Ca-olt, ſays the poet, were

Siol Erin na gorm lánn.
The ſons of Erin *of blue ſteel.*

Neither

Neither ſhall I much diſpute the matter with him: He has my conſent alſo to appropriate to Ireland the celebrated Ton-ioſal. I ſhall only ſay, that they are different perſons from thoſe of the ſame name, in the Scotch poems; and that, tho' the ſtupenduous valour of the firſt is ſo remarkable, they have not been equally lucky with the latter, in their poet. It is ſomewhat extraordinary, that *Fion*, who lived ſome ages before St. Patrick, ſwears like a very good chriſtian:

Air an Dia do chum gach *caſe*.
By God, who ſhaped every caſe.

It is worthy of being remarked, that, in the line quoted, Oſſian, who lived in St. Patrick's days, ſeems to have underſtood ſomething of the Engliſh, a language not then ſubſiſting. A perſon, more ſanguine for the honour of his country than I am, might argue, from this circumſtance, that this pretendedly Iriſh Oſſian was a native of Scotland; for my countrymen are univerſally allowed to have an excluſive right to the ſecond-ſight.

From the inſtances given, the reader may form a compleat idea of the Iriſh compoſitions concerning the *Fiona*. The greateſt part of them make the heroes of *Fion*,

Siol Albin a n'nioma caoile.
The race of Albion *of many firths*.

The reſt make them natives of Ireland. But, the truth is, that their authority is of little conſequence on either ſide. From the inſtances I have given, they appear to have been the work of a very

modern period. The pious ejaculations they contain, their alluſions to the manners of the times, fix them to the fifteenth century. Had even the authors of theſe pieces avoided all alluſions to their own times, it is impoſſible that the poems could paſs for ancient, in the eyes of any perſon tolerably converſant with the Iriſh tongue. The idiom is ſo corrupted and ſo many words borrowed from the Engliſh, that that language muſt have made conſiderable progreſs in Ireland before the poems were writ.

It remains now to ſhew, how the Iriſh bards begun to appropriate Oſſian and his heroes to their own country. After the Engliſh conqueſt, many of the natives of Ireland, averſe to foreign yoke, either actually were in a ſtate of hoſtility with the conquerors, or at leaſt, paid little regard to their government. The Scots, in thoſe ages, were often in open war, and never in cordial friendſhip with the Engliſh. The ſimilarity of manners and language, the traditions concerning their common origin, and above all, their having to do with the ſame enemy, created a free and friendly intercourſe between the Scotch and Iriſh nations. As the cuſtom of retaining bards and ſenachies was common to both; ſo each, no doubt, had formed a ſyſtem of hiſtory, it matters not how much ſoever fabalous, concerning their reſpective origin. It was the natural policy of the times, to reconcile the traditions of both nations together, and, if poſſible, to deduce them from the ſame original ſtock.

The Saxon manners and language had, at that time, made great progreſs in the ſouth of Scotland. The ancient language, and the traditional hiſtory of the nation, became confined entirely to the inhabitants of the Highlands, then fallen, from ſeveral concurring circumſtances, into the laſt degree of ignorance and barbariſm. The Iriſh, who,

for

for ſome ages before the conqueſt, had poſſeſſed a competent ſhare of that kind of learning, which then prevailed in Europe, found it no difficult matter to impoſe their own fictions on the ignorant Highland ſenachies. By flattering the vanity of the Highlanders, with their long liſt of Heremonian kings and heroes, they, without contradiction, aſſumed to themſelves the character of being the mother-nation of the Scots of Britain. At this time, certainly, was eſtabliſhed that Hibernian ſyſtem of the original of the Scots, which afterwards, for want of any other, was univerſally received. The Scots, of the low-country, who, by loſing the language of their anceſtors, loſt, together with it, their national traditions, received, implicitly, the hiſtory of their country, from Iriſh refugees, or from Highland ſenachies, perſuaded over into the Hibernian ſyſtem.

These circumſtances, are far from being ideal. We have remaining many particular traditions, which bear teſtimony to a fact, of itſelf abundantly probable. What makes the matter inconteſtible is, that the antient traditional accounts of the genuine origin of the Scots, have been handed down without interruption. Tho' a few ignorant ſenachies might be perſuaded out of their own opinion, by the ſmoothneſs of an Iriſh tale, it was impoſſible to eradicate, from among the bulk of the people, their own national traditions. Theſe traditions afterwards ſo much prevailed, that the Highlanders continue totally unacquainted with the pretended Hibernian extract of the Scots nation. Ignorant chronicle writers, ſtrangers to the antient language of their country, preſerved only from falling to the ground, ſo improbable a ſtory.

It was, during the period I have mentioned, that the Iriſh became acquainted with, and carried into their country, the compoſitions of Oſſian. The ſcene of many of the pieces being in Ireland, ſuggeſted firſt to them a hint, of making both heroes and poet na-

tives of that Iſland. In order to do this effectually, they found it neceſſary, to reject the genuine poems, as every line was pregnant with proofs of their Scotch original, and to dreſs up a fable, on the ſame ſubject, in their own language. So ill qualified, however, were their bards to effectuate this change, that amidſt all their deſires to make the *Fiona* Iriſhmen, they every now and then call *Siol Albin*. It was, probably, after a ſucceſſion of ſome generations, that the bards had effrontery enough to eſtabliſh an Iriſh genealogy for *Fion*, and deduce him from the Mileſian race of kings. In ſome of the oldeſt Iriſh poems, on the ſubject, the great-grand-father of *Fion* is made a Scandinavian; and his heroes are often called SIOL LOCHLIN NA B-EUM; *i. e. the race of Lochlin of wounds*. The only poem that runs up the family of *Fion* to Nuades Niveus, king of Ireland, is evidently not above a hundred and fifty years old; for, if I miſtake not, it mentions the Earl of Tyrone, ſo famous in Elizabeth's time.

THIS ſubject, perhaps, is purſued further than it deſerves; but, a diſcuſſion of the pretenſions of Ireland to Oſſian, was become in ſome meaſure neceſſary. If the Iriſh poems, concerning the *Fiona*, ſhould appear ridiculous, it is but juſtice to obſerve, that they are ſcarcely more ſo than the poems of other nations, at that period. On other ſubjects, the bards of Ireland have diſplayed a genius worthy of any age or nation. It was, alone, in matters of antiquity, that they were monſtrous in their fables. Their love-ſonnets, and their elegies on the death of perſons worthy or renowned, abound with ſuch beautiful ſimplicity of ſentiment, and wild harmony of numbers, that they become more than an attonement for their errors, in every other ſpecies of poetry. But the beauty of theſe pieces, depend ſo much on a certain *curioſa felicitas* of expreſſion in the original, that they muſt appear much to diſadvantage in another language.

CON-

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE poem that ſtands firſt in this collection had its name from TEMORA, the royal palace of the firſt Iriſh kings of the Caledonian race, in the province of Ulſter.

A

CRITICAL DISSERTATION

ON THE

POEMS OF OSSIAN,

THE

SON OF FINGAL.

AMONG the monuments remaining of the ancient ſtate of nations, few are more valuable than their poems or ſongs. Hiſtory, when it treats of remote and dark ages, is ſeldom very inſtructive. The beginnings of ſociety, in every country, are involved in fabulous confuſion; and though they were not, they would furniſh few events worth recording. But, in every period of ſociety, human manners are a curious ſpectacle; and the moſt natural pictures of ancient manners are exhibited in the ancient poems of nations. Theſe preſent to us, what is much more valuable than the hiſtory of ſuch tranſactions as a rude age can afford, The hiſtory of human imagination and paſſion. They make us acquainted with the notions and feelings of our fellow-creatures in the moſt artleſs ages; diſcovering what objects they admired, and what pleaſures they purſued, before thoſe refinements of ſociety had taken place, which enlarge indeed, and diverſify the tranſactions, but diſguiſe the manners of mankind.

Beſides this merit, which ancient poems have with philoſophical obſervers of human nature, they have another with perſons of taſte. They promiſe ſome of the higheſt beauties of poetical writing. Irregular and unpoliſhed we may expect the productions of uncultivated ages to be; but abounding, at the ſame time, with that enthuſiaſm, that vehemence and fire, which are the ſoul of poetry. For many circumſtances of thoſe times which we call barbarous, are favourable to the poetical ſpirit. That ſtate, in which human nature ſhoots wild and free, though unfit for other improvements, certainly encourages the high exertions of fancy and paſſion.

In the infancy of ſocieties, men live ſcattered and diſperſed, in the midſt of ſolitary rural ſcenes, where the beauties of nature are their chief entertainment. They meet with many objects, to them new and ſtrange; their wonder and ſurprize are frequently excited; and by the ſudden changes of fortune occurring in their unſettled ſtate of life, their paſſions are raiſed to the utmoſt. Their paſſions have nothing to reſtrain them: their imagination has nothing to check it. They diſplay themſelves to one another without diſguiſe; and converſe and act in the uncovered ſimplicity of nature. As their feelings are ſtrong, ſo their language, of itſelf, aſſumes a poetical turn. Prone to exaggerate, they deſcribe every thing in the ſtrongeſt colours; which of courſe renders their ſpeech pictureſque and figurative. Figurative language owes its riſe chiefly to two cauſes; to the want of proper names for objects, and to the influence of imagination and paſſion over the form of expreſſion. Both theſe cauſes concurr in the infancy of ſociety. Figures are commonly conſidered as artificial modes of ſpeech, deviſed by orators and poets, after the world had advanced to a refined ſtate. The contrary of this is the truth. Men never have uſed ſo many figures of ſtyle, as in thoſe rude ages, when, beſides the power of a warm imagination to ſuggeſt lively images, the want of proper and preciſe terms for the ideas they would expreſs, obliged them to have recourſe to circumlocution, metaphor, compariſon, and all thoſe ſubſtituted forms of expreſſion, which give a poetical air to language. An American chief, at this day, harangues at the head of his tribe, in a more bold metaphorical ſtyle, than a modern European would adventure to uſe in an Epic poem.

In the progreſs of ſociety, the genius and manners of men undergo a change more favourable to accuracy than to ſprightlineſs and ſublimity. As the world advances, the underſtanding gains ground upon the imagination; the underſtanding is more exerciſed; the imagination, leſs. Fewer objects occur that are new or ſurprizing. Men apply themſelves to trace the cauſes of things; they correct and refine one another; they ſubdue or diſguiſe their paſſions; they form their exterior manners upon one uniform ſtandard of politeneſs and civility. Human nature is pruned according to method and rule. Language advances from ſterility to copiouſneſs, and at the ſame time, from fervour and enthuſiaſm, to correctneſs and preciſion. Style becomes more chaſte; but leſs animated. The progreſs of the world in this reſpect reſembles the progreſs of age in man. The powers of imagination are moſt vigorous and predominant in youth; thoſe of the underſtanding ripen more ſlowly, and often attain not their maturity, till the imagination begin to flag. Hence, poetry, which is the child of imagination, is frequently moſt glowing and animated in the firſt ages of ſociety. As the ideas of our youth are remembered with a peculiar pleaſure on account of their livelineſs and vivacity; ſo the moſt ancient poems have often proved the greateſt favourites of nations.

Poetry has been ſaid to be more ancient than proſe: and however paradoxical ſuch an aſſertion may ſeem, yet, in a qualified ſenſe, it is true. Men certainly never converſed with one another in regular numbers; but even their ordinary language would in ancient times, for the reaſons before aſſigned, approach to a poetical ſtyle; and the firſt compoſitions tranſmitted to poſterity, beyond doubt, were, in a literal ſenſe, poems; that is, compoſitions in which imagination had the chief hand, formed into ſome kind of numbers, and pronounced with a muſical modulation or tone. Muſick or ſong has been found coæval with ſociety among the moſt barbarous nations. The only ſubjects which could prompt men, in their firſt rude ſtate, to utter their thoughts in compoſitions of any length, were ſuch as naturally aſſumed the tone of poetry; praiſes of their gods, or of their anceſtors; commemorations of their own warlike exploits; or lamentations over their misfortunes. And before writing was invented, no other compoſitions, except ſongs or poems, could take ſuch hold of the imagination and

memory, as to be preſerved by oral tradition, and handed down from one race to another.

Hence we may expect to find poems among the antiquities of all nations. It is probable too, that an extenſive ſearch would diſcover a certain degree of reſemblance among all the moſt ancient poetical productions, from whatever country they have proceeded. In a ſimilar ſtate of manners, ſimilar objects and paſſions operating upon the imaginations of men, will ſtamp their productions with the ſame general character. Some diverſity will, no doubt, be occaſioned by climate and genius. But mankind never bear ſuch reſembling features, as they do in the beginnings of ſociety. Its ſubſequent revolutions give riſe to the principal diſtinctions among nations; and divert, into channels widely ſeparated, that current of human genius and manners, which deſcends originally from one ſpring. What we have been long accuſtomed to call the oriental vein of poetry, becauſe ſome of the earlieſt poetical productions have come to us from the Eaſt, is probably no more oriental than occidental; it is characteriſtical of an age rather than a country; and belongs, in ſome meaſure, to all nations at a certain period. Of this the works of Oſſian ſeem to furniſh a remarkable proof.

Our preſent ſubject leads us to inveſtigate the ancient poetical remains, not ſo much of the eaſt, or of the Greeks and Romans, as of the northern nations; in order to diſcover whether the Gothic poetry has any reſemblance to the Celtic or Galic, which we are about to conſider. Though the Goths, under which name we uſually comprehend all the Scandinavian tribes, were a people altogether fierce and martial, and noted, to a proverb, for their ignorance of the liberal arts, yet they too, from the earlieſt times, had their poets and their ſongs. Their poets were diſtinguiſhed by the title of *Scalders*, and their ſongs were termed *Vyſes*.* Saxo Grammaticus,

* Olaus Wormius, in the appendix to his Treatiſe de Literatura Runica, has given a particular account of the Gothic poetry, commonly called Runic, from *Runa*, which ſignifies the Gothic letters. He informs us that there were no fewer than 136 different heads of meaſure or verſe uſed in their *Vyſes*; and though we are accuſtomed to call rhyme a Gothic invention, he ſays expreſly, that among all theſe meaſures, rhyme, or correſpondence of final ſyllables, was never employed. He analyſes the ſtructure of one of theſe kinds of verſe, that in which the poem of Lodbrog, afterwards quoted, is written; which exhibits a very ſingular ſpecies of harmony, if it can be allowed that name, depending neither upon rhyme nor

maticus, a Daniſh Hiſtorian of conſiderable note, who flouriſhed in the thirteenth century, informs us that very many of theſe ſongs, containing the ancient traditionary ſtories of the country, were found engraven upon rocks in the old Runic character; ſeveral of which he has tranſlated into Latin, and inſerted into his Hiſtory. But his verſions are plainly ſo paraphraſtical, and forced into ſuch an imitation of the ſtyle and the meaſures of the Roman poets, that one can form no judgment from them of the native ſpirit of the original. A more curious monument of the true Gothic poetry is preſerved by Olaus Wormius in his book de Literatura Runica. It is an Epicedium, or funeral ſong, compoſed by Regner Lodbrog; and tranſlated by Olaus, word for word, from the original. This Lodbrog was a king of Denmark, who lived in the eighth century, famous for his wars and victories; and at the ſame time an eminent *Scalder* or poet. It was his misfortune to fall at laſt into the hands of one of his enemies, by whom he was thrown into priſon, and condemned to be deſtroyed by ſerpents. In this ſituation he ſolaced himſelf with rehearſing all the exploits of his life. The poem is divided into twenty-nine ſtanzas, of ten lines each; and every ſtanza begins with theſe words, Pugnavimus Enſibus, We have fought with our ſwords. Olaus's verſion is in many places ſo obſcure as to be hardly intelligible. I have ſubjoined the whole below,

nor upon metrical feet, or quantity of ſyllables, but chiefly upon the number of the ſyllables, and the diſpoſition of the letters. In every ſtanza was an equal number of lines: in every line ſix ſyllables. In each diſtich, it was requiſite that three words ſhould begin with the ſame letter; two of the correſponding words placed in the firſt line of the diſtich, the third, in the ſecond line. In each line were alſo required two ſyllables, but never the final ones, formed either of the ſame conſonants, or ſame vowels. As an example of this meaſure, Olaus gives us theſe two Latin lines, conſtructed exactly according to the above rules of Runic verſe;

Chriſtus caput noſtrum
Coronet te bonis.

The initial letters of Chriſtus, Caput and Coronet, make the three correſponding letters of the diſtich. In the firſt line, the firſt ſyllables of Chriſtus and of noſtrum; in the ſecond line, the *en* in coronet and in bonis make the requiſite correſpondence of ſyllables. Frequent inverſions and tranſpoſitions were permitted in this poetry; which would naturally follow from ſuch laborious attention to the collocation of words.

The curious on this ſubject may conſult likewiſe Dr. Hicks's Theſaurus Linguarum Septentrionalium; particularly the 23d chapter of his Grammatica Anglo Saxonica & Mæſo Gothica; where they will find a full account of the ſtructure of the Anglo-Saxon verſe, which nearly reſembled the Gothic. They will find alſo ſome ſpecimens both of Gothic and Saxon poetry. An extract, which Dr. Hicks has given from the work of one of the Daniſh

low, exactly as he has publiſhed it; and ſhall tranſlate as much as may give the Engliſh reader an idea of the ſpirit and ſtrain of this kind of poetry.*

" We have fought with our ſwords.—I was young, when, to-
" wards the eaſt, in the bay of Oreon, we made torrents of blood
" flow, to gorge the ravenous beaſt of prey, and the yellow-
" footed bird. There reſounded the hard ſteel upon the lofty hel-
" mets

* Daniſh Scalders, entitled, Hervarer Saga, containing an evocation from the dead, may be found in the 6th volume of Miſcellany Poems, publiſhed by Mr. Dryden.

1.

Pugnavimus Enſibus
Haud poſt longum tempus
Cum in Gotlandia acceſſimus
Ad ſerpentis immenſi necem
Tunc impetravimus Thoram
Ex hoc vocarunt me virum
Quod ſerpentem transfodi
Hirſutam braccam ob illam cedem
Cuſpide ictum intuli in colubrum
Ferro lucidorum ſtipendiorum.

2.

Multum juvenis fui quando acquiſivimus
Orientem verſus in Oreonico freto
Vulnerum amnes avidæ feræ
Et flavipedi avi
Accepimus ibidem ſonuerunt
Ad ſublimes galeas
Dura ferra magnam eſcam
Omnis erat oceanus vulnus
Vadavit corvus in ſanguine Cæſorum.

3.

Alte tulimus tunc lanceas
Quando viginti annos numeravimus
Et celebrem laudem comparavimus paſſim
Vicimus octo barones
In oriente ante Dimini portum
Aquilæ impetravimus tunc ſufficientem
Hoſpitii ſumptum in illa ſtrage
Sudor decidit in vulnerum
Oceano perdidit exercitus ætatem.

4.

Pugnæ facta copia
Cum Helſingianos poſtulavimus
Ad aulam Odini
Naves direximus in oſtium Viſtulæ
Mucro potuit tum mordere
Omnis erat vulnus unda
Terra rubefacta Calido
Frendebat gladius in loricas
Gladius findebat Clypeos.

5.

Memini neminem tunc fugiſſe
Priuſquam in navibus
Heraudus in bello caderet
Non findit navibus
Alius baro præſtantior
Mare ad portum
In navibus longis poſt illum
Sic attulit princeps paſſim
Alacre in bellum cor.

6.

Exercitus abjecit clypeos
Cum haſta volavit
Ardua ad virorum pectora
Momordit Scarforum cautes
Gladius in pugna
Sanguineus erat Clypeus
Antequam Raſno rex caderet
Fluxit ex virorum capitibus
Calidus in loricas ſudor.

7.

Habere potuerunt tum corvi
Ante Indirorum inſulas
Sufficientem prædam dilaniandam
Acquiſivimus feris carnivoris
Plenum prandium unico actu
Difficile erat unius facere mentionem
Oriente ſole
Spicula vidi pungere
Propulerunt arcus ex ſe ferra.

" mets of men. The whole ocean was one wound. The crow " waded in the blood of the ſlain. When we had numbered " twenty years, we lifted our ſpears on high, and every where " ſpread our renown. Eight barons we overcame in the eaſt, be- " fore the port of Diminum; and plentifully we feaſted the eagle " in

8.

Altum mugierunt enſes
Antequam in Laneo campo
Eiſſinus rex cecidit
Proceſſimus auro ditati
Ad terram proſtratorum dimicandum
Gladius ſecuit Clypeorum
Picturas in galearum conventu
Cervicum muſtum ex vulneribus
Diffuſum per cerebrum fiſſum.

9.

Tenuimus Clypeos in ſanguine
Cum haſtam unximus
Ante Boring holmum
Telorum nubes diſrumpunt clypeum
Extruſit arcus ex ſe metallum
Volnir cecidit in conflictu
Non erat illo rex major
Cæſi diſperſi late per littora
Feræ amplectebantur eſcam.

10.

Pugna manifeſte creſcebat
Antequam Freyr rex caderet
In Flandrorum terra
Cæpit cæruleus ad incidendum
Sanguine illitus in aueam
Loricam in pugna
Durus armorum mucro olim
Virgo deploravit matutinam lanienam
Multa præda dabatur ferís.

11.

Centies centenos vidi jacere
In navibus
Ubi Æglanes vocatur
Navigavimus ad pugnam
Per ſex dies antequam exercitus caderet
Tranſegimus mucronum miſſam
In exortu ſolis
Coactus eſt pro noſtris gladiis
Valdioſur in bello occumbere.

12.

Ruit pluvia ſanguinis de gladiis
Præceps in Bardaſyrde
Pallidum corpus pro accipitribus
Murmuravit arcus ubi mucro
Acriter mordebat Loricas
In conflictu
Odini Pileus Galea
Cucurrit arcus ad vulnus
Venenate acutus conſperſus ſudore ſanguineo.

13.

Tenuimus magica ſcuta
Alte in pugnæ ludo
Ante Hiadningum ſinum
Videre licuit tum viros
Qui gladiis lacerarunt Clypeos
In gladiatorio murmure
Galeæ attritæ virorum
Erat ſicut ſplendidam virginem
In lecto juxta ſe collocare

14.

Dura venit tempeſtas Clypeis
Cadaver cecidit in terram
In Nortumbria
Erat circa matutinum tempus
Hominibus neceſſum erat fugere
Ex prælio ubi acute
Caſſidis campos mordebant gladii
Erat hoc veluti Juvenem viduam
In primaria ſede oſculari.

15.

Herthiofe evaſit fortunatus
In Auſtralibus Orcadibus ipſe
Victoriæ in noſtris hominibus
Cogebatur in armorum nimbo
Rogvaldus occumbere
Iſte venit ſummus ſuper accipitres
Luctus in gladiorum ludo
Strenue jactabat concuſſor
Galeæ ſanguinis teli. 16.

" in that ſlaughter. The warm ſtream of wounds ran into the " ocean. The army fell before us. When we ſteered our ſhips " into the mouth of the Viſtula, we ſent the Helſingians to the " Hall of Odin. Then did the ſword bite. The waters were all " one wound. The earth was dyed red with the warm ſtream. " The

16.

Quilibet jacebat tranſverſim ſupra alium
Gaudebat pugna lætus
Accipiter ob gladiorum ludum
Non fecit aquilam aut aprum
Qui Irlandiam gubernavit
Conventus fiebat ferri & Clypei
Marſtanus rex jejunis
Fiebat in vedræ ſinu
Præda data corvis.

17.

Bellatorem multum vidi cadere
Mane ante machæram
Virum in mucronum diſſidio
Filio meo incidit mature
Gladius juxta cor
Egillus fecit Agnerum ſpoliatum
Imperterritum virum vita
Sonuit lancea prope Hamdi
Griſeam loricam ſplendebant vexilla.

18.

Verborum tenaces vidi diſſecare
Haut minutim pro lupis
Eudili matis enſibus
Erat per Hebdomadæ ſpacium
Quaſi mulieres vinum apportarent
Rubefactæ erant naves
Valde in ſtrepitu armorum
Sciſſa erat lorica
In Scioldungorum prælio.

19.

Pulchricomum vidi crepuſculaſcere
Virginis amatorem circa matutinum
Et confabulationis amicum viduarum
Erat ſicut calidum balneum
Vinei vaſis nympha portaret
Nos in Ilæ freto
Antiquam Orn rex caderet
Sanguineum Clypeum vidi ruptum
Hoc invertit virorum vitam.

20.

Egimus gladiorum ad cædem
Ludum in Lindis inſula
Cum regibus tribus
Pauci potuerunt inde lætari
Cecidit multus in rictum ferarum
Accipiter dilaniavit carnem cum lupo
Ut fatur inde diſcederet
Hybernorum ſanguis in oceanum
Copioſe decidit per mactationis tempus.

21.

Alte gladius mordebat Clypeos
Tunc cum aurei coloris
Haſta fricabat loricas
Videre licuit in Onlugs inſula
Per ſecula multum poſt
Ibi fuit ad gladiorum ludos
Reges proceſſerunt
Rubicundum erat circa inſulam
Ar volans Draco vulnerum.

22.

Quid eſt viro forti morte certius
Etſi ipſe in armorum nimbo
Adverſus collocatus ſit
Sæpe deplorat ætatem
Qui nunquam premitur
Malum ferunt timidum incitare
Aquilam ad gladiorum ludum
Meticuloſus venit naſpiam
Cordi ſuo uſui.

23.

Hoc numero æquum ut procedat
In contactu gladiorum
Juvenis unus contra alterum
Non retrocedat viraviro.
Hoc fuit viri fortis nobilitas diu
Semper debet amoris amicus virginum
Audax eſſe in fremitu armorum.

24.

" The ſword rung upon the coats of mail, and clove the buck'ers " in twain. None fled on that day, till among his ſhips Heraudus " fell. Than him no braver baron cleaves the ſea with ſhips; a " chearful heart did he ever bring to the combat. Then the hoſt " threw away their ſhields, when the uplifted ſpear flew at the " breaſts of heroes. The ſword bit the Scarſian rocks; bloody " was the ſhield in battle, until Rafno the king was ſlain. From " the heads of warriors the warm ſweat ſtreamed down their ar- " mour. The crows around the Indirian iſlands had an ample " prey. It were difficult to ſingle out one among ſo many deaths. " At the riſing of the ſun I beheld the ſpears piercing the bodies of " foes, and the bows throwing forth their ſteel-pointed arrows. " Loud roared the ſwords in the plains of Lano.—The virgin long " bewailed the ſlaughter of that morning."—In this ſtrain the poet continues to deſcribe ſeveral other military exploits. The images are not much varied; the noiſe of arms, the ſtreaming of blood, and

24.

Hoc videtur mihi re vera
Quod fata ſequimur
Rarus tranſgreditur fata Parcarum
Non deſtinavi Ellæ
De vita exitu meæ
Cum ego ſanguinem ſemimortuus tegerem
Et naves in aquas protruſi
Paſſim impetravimus tum feris
Eſcam in Scotiæ ſinubus.

25.

Hoc ridere me facit ſemper
Quod Balderi patris ſcamna
Parata ſcio in aula
Bibemus cereviſiam brevi
Ex concavis crateribus craniorum
Non gemit vir fortis contra mortem
Magnifici in Odini domibus
Non venio deſperabundis
Verbis ad odini aulam.

26.

Hic vellent nunc omnes
Filii Aſlaugæ gladiis
Amarum bellum excitare
Si exacte ſcirent
Calamitates noſtras
Quem non pauci angues
Venenati me diſcerpunt
Matrem accepi meis
Filiis ita ut corda valeant.

27.

Valde inclinatur ad hæreditatem
Crudele ſtat nocumentum a vipera
Anguis inhabitat aulam cordis
Speramus alterius ad Othini
Virgam in Ellæ ſanguine
Filiis meis liveſcet
Sua ira rubeſcet
Non acres juvenes
Seſſionem tranquillam facient.

28.

Habeo quinquagies
Prælia ſub ſignis facta
Ex belli invitatione & ſemel
Minime putavi hominum
Quod me futurus eſſet
Juvenis didici mucronem rubeſacere
Alius rex præſtantior
Nos Aſæ invitabunt
Non eſt lugenda mors.

29.

Fert animus finire
Invitant me Dyſæ
Quas ex Othini Aula
Othinus mihi miſit
Lætus cereviſiam cum Aſis
In ſumma ſede bibam
Vitæ elapſæ ſunt horæ
Ridens moriar.

the feasting the birds of prey, often recurring. He mentions the death of two of his sons in battle; and the lamentation he describes as made for one of them is very singular. A Grecian or Roman poet would have introduced the virgins or nymphs of the wood, bewailing the untimely fall of a young hero. But, says our Gothic poet, "when "Rogvaldus was slain, for him mourned all the hawks of heaven," as lamenting a benefactor who had so liberally supplied them with prey; "for boldly," as he adds, "in the strife of swords, did the "breaker of helmets throw the spear of blood."

The poem concludes with sentiments of the highest bravery and contempt of death. "What is more certain to the brave man than "death, though amidst the storm of swords, he stand always ready "to oppose it? He only regrets this life who hath never known "distress. The timorous man allures the devouring eagle to the "field of battle. The coward, wherever he comes, is useless to him-"self. This I esteem honourable, that the youth should advance to "the combat fairly matched one against another; nor man retreat "from man. Long was this the warrior's highest glory. He who "aspires to the love of virgins, ought always to be foremost in the roar "of arms. It appears to me of truth, that we are led by the Fates. "Seldom can any overcome the appointment of destiny. Little did "I foresee that Ella* was to have my life in his hands, in that day "when fainting I concealed my blood, and pushed forth my ships into "the waves; after we had spread a repast for the beasts of prey "throughout the Scottish bays. But this makes me always rejoice "that in the halls of our father Balder [or Odin] I know there are "seats prepared, where, in a short time, we shall be drinking ale "out of the hollow skulls of our enemies. In the house of the "mighty Odin, no brave man laments death. I come not with the "voice of despair to Odin's hall. How eagerly would all the sons "of Aslauga now ruth to war, did they know the distress of their "father, whom a multitude of venomous serpents tear! I have given "to my children a mother who hath filled their hearts with valour. "I am fast approaching to my end. A cruel death awaits me from "the viper's bite. A snake dwells in the midst of my heart. I "hope that the sword of some of my sons shall yet be stained with "the blood of Ella. The valiant youths will wax red with anger, "and will not sit in peace. Fifty and one times have I reared the

* This was the name of his enemy who had condemned him to death.

" ſtandard in battle. In my youth I learned to dye the ſword in " blood: my hope was then, that no king among men would be " more renowned than me. The goddeſſes of death will now " ſoon call me; I muſt not mourn my death. Now I end my " ſong. The goddeſſes invite me away; they whom Odin has ſent " to me from his hall. I will ſit upon a lofty ſeat, and drink ale " joyfully with the goddeſſes of death. The hours of my life are " run out. I will ſmile when I die."

This is ſuch poetry as we might expect from a barbarous nation. It breathes a moſt ferocious ſpirit. It is wild, harſh and irregular; but at the ſame time animated and ſtrong; the ſtyle, in the original, full of inverſions, and, as we learn from ſome of Olaus's notes, highly metaphorical and figured.

But when we open the works of Oſſian, a very different ſcene preſents itſelf. There we find the fire and the enthuſiaſm of the moſt early times, combined with an amazing degree of regularity and art. We find tenderneſs, and even delicacy of ſentiment, greatly predominant over fierceneſs and barbarity. Our hearts are melted with the ſofteſt feelings, and at the ſame time elevated with the higheſt ideas of magnanimity, generoſity, and true heroiſm. When we turn from the poetry of Lodbrog to that of Oſſian, it is like paſſing from a ſavage deſart, into a fertile and cultivated country. How is this to be accounted for? Or by what means to be reconciled with the remote antiquity attributed to theſe poems? This is a curious point; and requires to be illuſtrated.

That the ancient Scots were of Celtic original, is paſt all doubt. Their conformity with the Celtic nations in language, manners and religion, proves it to a full demonſtration. The Celtæ, a great and mighty people, altogether diſtinct from the Goths and Teutones, once extended their dominion over all the weſt of Europe; but ſeem to have had their moſt full and compleat eſtabliſhment in Gaul. Wherever the Celtæ or Gauls are mentioned by ancient writers, we ſeldom fail to hear of their Druids and their Bards; the inſtitution of which two orders, was the capital diſtinction of their manners and policy. The Druids were their philoſophers and prieſts; the Bards, their poets and recorders of heroic actions: And both theſe orders of men, ſeem to have ſubſiſted among them, as chief

members of the ſtate, from time immemorial *. We muſt not therefore imagine the Celtæ to have been altogether a groſs and rude nation. They poſſeſſed from very remote ages a formed ſyſtem of diſcipline and manners, which appears to have had a deep and laſting influence. Ammianus Marcellinus gives them this expreſs teſtimony, that there flouriſhed among them the ſtudy of the moſt laudable arts; introduced by the Bards, whoſe office it was to ſing in heroic verſe, the gallant actions of illuſtrious men; and by the Druids, who lived together in colleges or ſocieties, after the Pythagorean manner, and philoſophizing upon the higheſt ſubjects, aſſerted the immortality of the human ſoul †. Though Julius Cæſar in his account of Gaul, does not expreſly mention the Bards, yet it is plain that under the title of Druids, he comprehends that whole college or order; of which the Bards, who, it is probable, were the diſciples of the Druids, undoubtedly made a part. It deſerves remark, that according to his account, the Druidical inſtitution firſt took riſe in Britain, and paſſed from thence into Gaul; ſo that they who aſpired to be thorough maſters of that learning were wont to reſort to Britain. He adds too, that ſuch as were to be initiated among the Druids, were obliged to commit to their memory a great number of verſes, inſomuch that ſome employed twenty years in this courſe of education; and that they did not think it lawful to record theſe poems in writing, but ſacredly handed them down by tradition from race to race ‡.

So ſtrong was the attachment of the Celtic nations to their poetry and their Bards, that amidſt all the changes of their government and manners, even long after the order of the Druids was extinct,

* Τρία φῦλα τῶν τιμωμενῶν διαφερόντως ἐσί. Βαρδοι τε καὶ ἑυάτεις, καὶ Δρύιδαι. Βαρδοι μεν ὑμνηταὶ καὶ ποιηταί. Strabo. lib. 4.

Εἰσι παρ' αὐτοῖς καὶ ποιηταὶ μελῶν, οὓς βαρδους ὀνομαζουσιν. ἔτοι δε μετ' ὀργάνων, ταῖς λυραις ὁμοιῶν, ἃς μεν ὑμνοῦσι, ἃς δε βλασφημοῦσι. Diodor. Sicul. l. 5.

Τα δε ἀκουσματα αὐτῶν εισιν οἱ καλουμενοι βαρδοι. ποιηταὶ δ' ὄντοι τυγχανουσι μετ' ὠδης ἐπαινες λεγοντες. Poſidonius ap. Athenæum, l. 6.

† Per hæc loca (ſpeaking of Gaul) hominibus paulatim excultis, *viguere ſtudia laudabilium doctrinarum*; inchoata per Bardos & Euhages & Druidas. Et Bardi quidem fortia virorum illuſtrium facta heroicis compoſita verſibus cum dulcibus lyræ modulis cantitarunt. Euhages vero ſcrutantes ſeriem & ſublimia naturæ pandere conabantur. Inter hos, Druidæ ingeniis celſiores, ut auctoritas Pythagoræ decrevit, ſodalitiis adſtricti conſortiis, quæſtionibus altarum occultarumque rerum erecti ſunt; & deſpectantes humana pronuntiarunt animas immortales. Amm. Marcellinus, l. 15. cap. 9.

‡ Vid. Cæſar de bello Gall. lib. 6.

and the national religion altered, the Bards continued to flouriſh; not as a ſet of ſtrolling ſongſters, like the Greek Ἀοιδοὶ or Rhapſodiſts, in Homer's time, but as an order of men highly reſpected in the ſtate, and ſupported by a publick eſtabliſhment. We find them, according to the teſtimonies of Strabo and Diodorus, before the age of Auguſtus Cæſar; and we find them remaining under the ſame name, and exerciſing the ſame functions as of old, in Ireland, and in the north of Scotland, almoſt down to our own times. It is well known that in both theſe countries, every *Regulus* or chief had his own Bard, who was conſidered as an officer of rank in his court; and had lands aſſigned him, which deſcended to his family. Of the honour in which the Bards were held, many inſtances occur in Oſſian's poems. On all important occaſions, they were the ambaſſadors between contending chiefs; and their perſons were held ſacred. "Cairbar feared to ſtretch his ſword to the bards, though his ſoul "was dark.—Looſe the bards, ſaid his brother Cathmor, they are "the ſons of other times. Their voice ſhall be heard in other ages, "when the kings of Temora have failed *."

From all this, the Celtic tribes clearly appear to have been addicted in ſo high a degree to poetry, and to have made it ſo much their ſtudy from the earlieſt times, as may remove our wonder at meeting with a vein of higher poetical refinement among them, than was at firſt ſight to have been expected among nations, whom we are accuſtomed to call barbarous. Barbarity, I muſt obſerve, is a very equivocal term; it admits of many different forms and degrees; and though, in all of them, it exclude poliſhed manners, it is, however, not inconſiſtent with generous ſentiments and tender affections †. What degrees of friendſhip, love and heroiſm, may poſſibly

* P. 188.

† Surely among the wild Laplanders, if any where, barbarity is in its moſt perfect ſtate. Yet their love ſongs which Scheffer has given us in his Lapponia, are a proof that natural tenderneſs of ſentiment may be found in a country, into which the leaſt glimmering of ſcience has never penetrated. To moſt Engliſh readers theſe ſongs are well known by the elegant tranſlations of them in the Spectator, No. 365 and 406. I ſhall ſubjoin Scheffer's Latin verſion of one of them, which has the appearance of being ſtrictly literal.

Sol, clariſſimum emitte lumen in paludem Orra. Si eniſus in ſumma picearum cacumina ſcirem me viſurum Orra paludem, in ea eniterer, ut viderem inter quos amica mea eſſet flores; omnes ſuſcinderem frutices ibi enatos, omnes ramos præſecarem, hos virentes ramos. Curſum nubium eſſem ſecutus, quæ iter ſuum [illegible] tuunt-

ſibly be found to prevail in a rude ſtate of ſociety, no one can ſay. Aſtoniſhing inſtances of them we know, from hiſtory, have ſometimes appeared: and a few characters diſtinguiſhed by thoſe high qualities, might lay a foundation for a ſet of manners being introduced into the ſongs of the Bards, more refined, it is probable, and exalted, according to the uſual poetical licence, than the real manners of the country. In particular, with reſpect to heroiſm; the great employment of the Celtic bards, was to delineate the characters, and ſing the praiſes of heroes. So Lucan;

> Vos quoque qui fortes animos, belloque peremptos,
> Laudibus in longum vates diffunditis ævum
> Plurima ſecuri fudiſtis carmina Bardi. *Pharſ.* l. 1.

Now when we conſider a college or order of men, who, cultivating poetry throughout a long ſeries of ages, had their imaginations continually employed on the ideas of heroiſm; who had all the poems and panegyricks, which were compoſed by their predeceſſors, handed down to them with care; who rivalled and endeavoured to outſtrip thoſe who had gone before them, each in the celebration of his particular hero; is it not natural to think, that at length the character of a hero would appear in their ſongs with the higheſt luſtre, and be adorned with qualities truly noble? Some of the qualities indeed which diſtinguiſh a Fingal, moderation, humanity, and clemency, would not probably be the firſt ideas of heroiſm occurring to a barbarous people: But no ſooner had ſuch ideas begun to dawn on the minds of poets, than, as the human mind eaſily opens to the native repreſentations of human perfection, they would be ſeized and embraced; they would enter into their panegyricks; they would afford materials for ſucceeding bards to work upon, and improve;

tuunt verſus paludem Orra, ſi ad te volare poſſem alis, cornicum alis. Sed mihi deſunt alæ, alæ querquedulæ, pedeſque, anſerum pedes plantæve bonæ, quæ deferre me valeant ad te. Satis expectaſti diu; per tot dies, tot dies tuos optimos, oculis tuis jucundiſſimis, corde tuo amiciſſimo. Quod ſi longiſſime velles effugere, cito tamen te conſequerer. Quid fermius validiuſve eſſe poteſt quam contorti nervi, catenæve ferreæ, quæ duriſſime ligant? Sic amor contorquet caput noſtrum, mutat cogitationes & ſententias. Puerorum voluntas, voluntas venti; juvenum cogitationes, longæ cogitationes. Quos ſi audirem omnes, a via, a via juſta declinarem. Unum eſt conſilium quod capiam; ita ſcio viam rectiorem me reperturum. Schefferi Lapponia, Cap. 25.

they

they would contribute not a little to exalt the publick manners. For ſuch ſongs as theſe, familiar to the Celtic warriors from their childhood, and throughout their whole life, both in war and in peace, their principal entertainment, muſt have had a very conſiderable influence in propagating among them real manners nearly approaching to the poetical; and in forming even ſuch a hero as Fingal. Eſpecially when we conſider that among their limited objects of ambition, among the few advantages which in a ſavage ſtate, man could obtain over man, the chief was Fame, and that Immortality which they expected to receive from their virtues and exploits, in the ſongs of bards †.

Having made theſe remarks on the Celtic poetry and Bards in general, I ſhall next conſider the particular advantages which Oſſian poſſeſſed. He appears clearly to have lived in a period which enjoyed all the benefit I juſt now mentioned of traditionary poetry. The exploits of Trathal, Trenmor, and the other anceſtors of Fingal, are ſpoken of as familiarly known. Ancient bards are frequently alluded to. In one remarkable paſſage, Oſſian deſcribes himſelf as living in a ſort of claſſical age, enlightened by the memorials of former times, conveyed in the ſongs of bards; and points at a period of darkneſs and ignorance which lay beyond the reach of tradition. "His words," ſays he, "came only by halves to our ears; they "were dark as the tales of other times, before the light of the ſong "aroſe ‡." Oſſian, himſelf, appears to have been endowed by nature with an exquiſite ſenſibility of heart; prone to that tender melancholy which is ſo often an attendant on great genius; and ſuſceptible equally of ſtrong and of ſoft emotions. He was not only a profeſſed bard, educated with care, as we may eaſily believe, to all the poetical art then known, and connected, as he ſhews us himſelf, in intimate friendſhip with the other contemporary bards, but a warrior alſo; and the ſon of the moſt renowned hero and prince of his age. This formed a conjunction of circumſtances, uncommonly favourable towards exalting the imagination of a poet. He relates expeditions in which he had been engaged; he ſings of battles in

† When Edward I. conquered Wales, he put to death all the Welch bards. This cruel policy plainly ſhews, how great an influence he imagined the ſongs of theſe bards to have over the minds of the people; and of what nature he judged that influence to be. The Welch bards were of the ſame Celtic race with the Scottiſh and Iriſh.

‡ P. 101.

which

which he had fought and overcome; he had beheld the moſt illuſtrious ſcenes which that age could exhibit, both of heroiſm in war, and magnificence in peace. For however rude the magnificence of thoſe times may ſeem to us, we muſt remember that all ideas of magnificence are comparative; and that the age of Fingal was an æra of diſtinguiſhed ſplendor in that part of the world. Fingal reigned over a conſiderable territory; he was enriched with the ſpoils of the Roman province; he was ennobled by his victories and great actions; and was in all reſpects a perſonage of much higher dignity than any of the chieftains, or heads of Clans, who lived in the ſame country, after a more extenſive monarchy was eſtabliſhed.

The manners of Oſſian's age, ſo far as we can gather them from his writings, were abundantly favourable to a poetical genius. The two diſpiriting vices, to which Longinus imputes the decline of poetry, covetouſneſs and effeminacy, were as yet unknown. The cares of men were few. They lived a roving indolent life; hunting and war their principal employments; and their chief amuſements, the muſick of bards and "the feaſt of ſhells." The great object purſued by heroic ſpirits, was "to receive their fame," that is, to become worthy of being celebrated in the ſongs of bards; and "to have "their name on the four gray ſtones." To die, unlamented by a bard, was deemed ſo great a misfortune, as even to diſturb their ghoſts in another ſtate. After death, they expected to follow employments of the ſame nature with thoſe which had amuſed them on earth; to fly with their friends on clouds, to purſue airy deer, and to liſten to their praiſe in the mouths of bards. In ſuch times as theſe, in a country where poetry had been ſo long cultivated, and ſo highly honoured, is it any wonder that among the race and ſucceſſion of bards, one Homer ſhould ariſe; a man who, endowed with a natural happy genius, favoured by peculiar advantages of birth and condition, and meeting in the courſe of his life, with a variety of incidents proper to fire his imagination, and to touch his heart, ſhould attain a degree of eminence in poetry, worthy to draw the admiration of more refined ages?

The compoſitions of Oſſian are ſo ſtrongly marked with characters of antiquity, that although there were no external proof to ſupport that antiquity, hardly any reader of judgment and taſte, could heſitate in referring them to a very remote æra. There are four great ſtages through which men ſucceſſively paſs in the progreſs of ſociety.

ſociety. The firſt and earlieſt is the life of hunters; paſturage ſucceeds to this, as the ideas of property begin to take root; next, agriculture; and laſtly, commerce. Throughout Oſſian's poems, we plainly find ourſelves in the firſt of theſe periods of ſociety; during which, hunting was the chief employment of men, and the principal method of their procuring ſubſiſtence. Paſturage was not indeed wholly unknown; for we hear of dividing the herd in the caſe of a divorce *; but the alluſions to herds and to cattle are not many; and of agriculture, we find no traces. No cities appear to have been built in the territories of Fingal. No art is mentioned except that of working in iron. Every thing preſents to us the moſt ſimple and unimproved manners. At their feaſts, the heroes prepared their own repaſt; they ſat round the light of the burning oak; the wind lifted their locks, and whiſtled through their open halls. Whatever was beyond the neceſſaries of life was known to them only as the ſpoil of the Roman province; "the gold of the ſtranger; the lights of the "ſtranger; the ſteeds of the ſtranger, the children of the rein †."

This repreſentation of Oſſian's times, muſt ſtrike us the more, as genuine and authentick, when it is compared with a poem of later date, which Mr. Macpherſon has preſerved in one of his notes. It is that wherein five bards are repreſented as paſſing the evening in the houſe of a chief, and each of them ſeparately giving his deſcription of the night ‡. The night ſcenery is beautiful; and the author has plainly imitated the ſtyle and manner of Oſſian: But he has allowed ſome images to appear which betray a later period of ſociety. For we meet with windows clapping, the herds of goats and cows ſeeking ſhelter, the ſhepherd wandering, corn on the plain, and the wakeful hind rebuilding the ſhocks of corn which had been overturned by the tempeſt. Whereas in Oſſian's works, from beginning to end, all is conſiſtent; no modern alluſion drops from him; but every where, the ſame face of rude nature appears; a country wholly uncultivated, thinly inhabited, and recently peopled. The

* P. 31.

† The chariot of Cuchullin has been thought by ſome to be repreſented as more magnificent than is conſiſtent with the poverty of that age; in Book I. of Fingal. But this chariot is plainly only a horſe-litter; and the gems mentioned in the deſcription, are no other than the ſhining ſtones or pebbles, known to be frequently found along the weſtern coaſt of Scotland.

‡ P. 253.

graſs of the rock, the flower of the heath, the thiſtle with its beard, are the chief ornaments of his landſcapes. "The deſart," ſays Fingal, "is enough to me, with all its woods and deer." *

The circle of ideas and tranſactions, is no wider than ſuits ſuch an age: Nor any greater diverſity introduced into characters, than the events of that period would naturally diſplay. Valour and bodily ſtrength are the admired qualities. Contentions ariſe, as is uſual among ſavage nations, from the ſlighteſt cauſes. To be affronted at a tournament, or to be omitted in the invitation to a feaſt, kindles a war. Women are often carried away by force; and the whole tribe, as in the Homeric times, riſe to avenge the wrong. The heroes ſhow refinement of ſentiment indeed on ſeveral occaſions, but none of manners. They ſpeak of their paſt actions with freedom, boaſt of their exploits, and ſing their own praiſe. In their battles, it is evident that drums, trumpets or bagpipes, were not known or uſed. They had no expedient for giving the military alarms but ſtriking a ſhield, or raiſing a loud cry: And hence the loud and terrible voice of Fingal is often mentioned, as a neceſſary qualification of a great general; like the βοὴν ἀγαθὸς Μενελαος of Homer. Of military diſcipline or ſkill, they appear to have been entirely deſtitute. Their armies ſeem not to have been numerous; their battles were diſorderly; and terminated, for the moſt part, by a perſonal combat, or wreſtling of the two chiefs; after which, "the "bard ſung the ſong of peace, and the battle ceaſed along the "field †."

The manner of compoſition bears all the marks of the greateſt antiquity. No artful tranſitions; nor full and extended connection of parts; ſuch as we find among the poets of later times, when order and regularity of compoſition were more ſtudied and known; but a ſtyle always rapid and vehement; in narration conciſe, even to abruptneſs, and leaving ſeveral circumſtances to be ſupplied by the reader's imagination. The language has all that figurative caſt, which, as I before ſhewed, partly a glowing and undiſciplined imagination, partly the ſterility of language, and the want of proper terms, have always introduced into the early ſpeech of nations; and in ſeveral reſpects, it carries a remarkable reſemblance to the ſtyle

* Page 78. † Page 140.

of

of the Old Teſtament. It deſerves particular notice, as one of the moſt genuine and deciſive characters of antiquity, that very few general terms or abſtract ideas, are to be met with in the whole collection of Oſſian's works. The ideas of men at firſt, were all particular. They had not words to expreſs general conceptions. Theſe were the conſequence of more profound reflection, and longer acquaintance with the arts of thought and of ſpeech. Oſſian, accordingly, almoſt never expreſſes himſelf in the abſtract. His ideas extended little farther than to the objects he ſaw around him. A publick, a community, the univerſe, were conceptions beyond his ſphere. Even a mountain, a ſea, or a lake, which he has occaſion to mention, though only in a ſimile, are for the moſt part particularized; it is the hill of Cromla, the ſtorm of the ſea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego. A mode of expreſſion, which whilſt it is characteriſtical of antient ages, is at the ſame time highly favourable to deſcriptive poetry. For the ſame reaſons, perſonification is a poetical figure not very common with Oſſian. Inanimate objects, ſuch as winds, trees, flowers, he ſometimes perſonifies with great beauty. But the perſonifications which are ſo familiar to later poets of Fame, Time, Terror, Virtue, and the reſt of that claſs, were unknown to our Celtic bard. Theſe were modes of conception too abſtract for his age.

All theſe are marks ſo undoubted, and ſome of them too, ſo nice and delicate, of the moſt early times, as put the high antiquity of theſe poems out of queſtion. Eſpecially when we conſider, that if there had been any impoſture in this caſe, it muſt have been contrived and executed in the Highlands of Scotland, two or three centuries ago; as up to this period, both by manuſcripts, and by the teſtimony of a multitude of living witneſſes, concerning the uncontrovertible tradition of theſe poems, they can clearly be traced. Now this is a period when that country enjoyed no advantages for a compoſition of this kind, which it may not be ſuppoſed to have enjoyed in as great, if not in a greater degree, a thouſand years before. To ſuppoſe that two or three hundred years ago, when we well know the Highlands to have been in a ſtate of groſs ignorance and barbarity, there ſhould have ariſen in that country a poet, of ſuch exquiſite genius, and of ſuch deep knowledge of mankind, and of hiſtory, as to diveſt himſelf of the ideas and manners of his own

age, and to give us a juſt and natural picture of a ſtate of ſociety ancienter by a thouſand years; one who could ſupport this counterfeited antiquity through ſuch a large collection of poems, without the leaſt inconſiſtency; and who poſſeſſed of all this genius and art, had at the ſame time the ſelf-denial of concealing himſelf, and of aſcribing his own works to an antiquated bard, without the impoſture being detected; is a ſuppoſition that tranſcends all bounds of credibility.

There are, beſides, two other circumſtances to be attended to, ſtill of greater weight, if poſſible, againſt this hypotheſis. One is, the total abſence of religious ideas from this work; for which the tranſlator has, in his preface, given a very probable account, on the footing of its being the work of Oſſian. The Druidical ſuperſtition was, in the days of Oſſian, on the point of its final extinction; and for particular reaſons, odious to the family of Fingal; whilſt the Chriſtian faith was not yet eſtabliſhed. But had it been the work of one, to whom the ideas of chriſtianity were familiar from his infancy; and who had ſuperadded to them alſo the bigotted ſuperſtition of a dark age and country; it is impoſſible but in ſome paſſage or other, the traces of them would have appeared. The other circumſtance is, the entire ſilence which reigns with reſpect to all the great clans or families, which are now eſtabliſhed in the Highlands. The origin of theſe ſeveral clans is known to be very ancient: And it is as well known, that there is no paſſion by which a native Highlander is more diſtinguiſhed, than by attachment to his clan, and jealouſy for its honour. That a Highland bard, in forging a work relating to the antiquities of his country, ſhould have inſerted no circumſtance which pointed out the riſe of his own clan, which aſcertained its antiquity, or increaſed its glory, is of all ſuppoſitions that can be formed, the moſt improbable; and the ſilence on this head, amounts to a demonſtration that the author lived before any of the preſent great clans were formed or known.

Aſſuming it then, as we well may, for certain, that the poems now under conſideration, are genuine venerable monuments of very remote antiquity; I proceed to make ſome remarks upon their general ſpirit and ſtrain. The two great characteriſtics of Oſſian's poetry are, tenderneſs and ſublimity. It breathes nothing of the gay

gay and chearful kind; an air of ſolemnity and ſericuſneſs is diffuſed over the whole. Oſſian is perhaps the only poet who never relaxes, or lets himſelf down into the light and amuſing ſtrain; which I readily admit to be no ſmall diſadvantage to him, with the bulk of readers. He moves perpetually in the high region of the grand and the pathetick. One key note is ſtruck at the beginning, and ſupported to the end; nor is any ornament introduced, but what is perfectly concordant with the general tone or melody. The events recorded, are all ſerious and grave; the ſcenery throughout, wild and romantic. The extended heath by the ſea ſhore; the mountain ſhaded with miſt; the torrent ruſhing through a ſolitary valley; the ſcattered oaks, and the tombs of warriors overgrown with moſs; all produce a ſolemn attention in the mind, and prepare it for great and extraordinary events. We find not in Oſſian, an imagination that ſports itſelf, and dreſſes out gay trifles to pleaſe the fancy. His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deſerves to be ſtiled, *The Poetry of the Heart*. It is a heart penetrated with noble ſentiments, and with ſublime and tender paſſions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy; a heart that is full, and pours itſelf forth. Oſſian did not write, like modern poets, to pleaſe readers and critics. He ſung from the love of poetry and ſong. His delight was to think of the heroes among whom he had flouriſhed; to recall the affecting incidents of his life; to dwell upon his paſt wars and loves and friendſhips; till, as he expreſſes it himſelf, "the "light of his ſoul aroſe; the days of other years roſe before him;" and under this true poetic inſpiration, giving vent to his genius, no wonder we ſhould ſo often hear, and acknowledge in his ſtrains, the powerful and ever-pleaſing voice of nature.

——— Arte, natura potentior omni.—
Eſt Deus in nobis, agitante caleſcimus illo.

It is neceſſary here to obſerve, that the beauties of Oſſian's writings cannot be felt by thoſe who have given them only a ſingle or a haſty peruſal. His manner is ſo different from that of the poets, to whom we are moſt accuſtomed; his ſtyle is ſo conciſe, and ſo much crowded with imagery; the mind is kept at ſuch a ſtretch in accompanying the author; that an ordinary reader is at firſt apt to be dazzled and fatigued, rather than pleaſed. His poems require to be taken up at intervals, and to be frequently reviewed; and then it

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is impoſſible but his beauties muſt open to every reader who is capable of ſenſibility. Thoſe who have the higheſt degree of it, will reliſh them the moſt.

As Homer is of all the great poets, the one whoſe manner, and whoſe times come the neareſt to Oſſian's, we are naturally led to run a parallel in ſome inſtances between the Greek and the Celtic bard. For though Homer lived more than a thouſand years before Oſſian, it is not from the age of the world, but from the ſtate of ſociety, that we are to judge of reſembling times. The Greek has in ſeveral points, a manifeſt ſuperiority. He introduces a greater variety of incidents; he poſſeſſes a larger compaſs of ideas; has more diverſity in his characters; and a much deeper knowledge of human nature. It was not to be expected, that in any of theſe particulars, Oſſian could equal Homer. For Homer lived in a country where ſociety was much farther advanced; he had beheld many more objects; cities built and flouriſhing; laws inſtituted; order, diſcipline, and arts begun. His field of obſervation was much larger and more ſplendid; his knowledge, of courſe, more extenſive; his mind alſo, it ſhall be granted, more penetrating. But if Oſſian's ideas and objects be leſs diverſified than thoſe of Homer, they are all, however, of the kind fitteſt for poetry: The bravery and generoſity of heroes, the tenderneſs of lovers, the attachments of friends, parents, and children. In a rude age and country, though the events that happen be few, the undiſſipated mind broods over them more; they ſtrike the imagination, and fire the paſſions in a higher degree; and of conſequence become happier materials to a poetical genius, than the ſame events when ſcattered through the wide circle of more varied action, and cultivated life.

Homer is a more chearful and ſprightly poet than Oſſian. You diſcern in him all the Greek vivacity; whereas Oſſian uniformly maintains the gravity and ſolemnity of a Celtic hero. This too is in a great meaſure to be accounted for from the different ſituations in which they lived, partly perſonal, and partly national. Oſſian had ſurvived all his friends, and was diſpoſed to melancholy by the incidents of his life. But beſides this, chearfulneſs is one of the many bleſſings which we owe to formed ſociety. The ſolitary wild ſtate is always a ſerious one. Bating the ſudden and violent burſts of mirth,

mirth, which ſometimes break forth at their dances and feaſts; the ſavage American tribes, have been noted by all travellers for their gravity and taciturnity. Somewhat of this taciturnity may be alſo remarked in Oſſian. On all occaſions he is frugal of his words; and never gives you more of an image or a deſcription, than is juſt ſufficient to place it before you in one clear point of view. It is a blaze of lightning, which flaſhes and vaniſhes. Homer is more extended in his deſcriptions; and fills them up with a greater variety of circumſtances. Both the poets are dramatick; that is, they introduce their perſonages frequently ſpeaking before us. But Oſſian is conciſe and rapid in his ſpeeches, as he is in every other thing. Homer, with the Greek vivacity, had alſo ſome portion of the Greek loquacity. His ſpeeches indeed are highly characteriſtical; and to them we are much indebted for that admirable diſplay he has given of human nature. Yet if he be tedious any where, it is in theſe; ſome of them trifling; and ſome of them plainly unſeaſonable. Both poets are eminently ſublime; but a difference may be remarked in the ſpecies of their ſublimity. Homer's ſublimity is accompanied with more impetuoſity and fire; Oſſian's with more of a ſolemn and awful grandeur. Homer hurries you along; Oſſian elevates, and fixes you in aſtoniſhment. Homer is moſt ſublime in actions and battles; Oſſian, in deſcription and ſentiment. In the pathetick, Homer, when he chuſes to exert it, has great power; but Oſſian exerts that power much oftener, and has the character of tenderneſs far more deeply imprinted on his works. No poet knew better how to ſeize and melt the heart. With regard to dignity of ſentiment, the pre-eminence muſt clearly be given to Oſſian. This is indeed a ſurpriſing circumſtance, that in point of humanity, magnanimity, virtuous feelings of every kind, our rude Celtic bard ſhould be diſtinguiſhed to ſuch a degree, that not only the heroes of Homer, but even thoſe of the polite and refined Virgil, are left far behind by thoſe of Oſſian.

After theſe general obſervations on the genius and ſpirit of our author, I now proceed to a nearer view, and more accurate examination of his works: And as Fingal is the moſt conſiderable poem in this collection, it is proper to begin with it. To refuſe the title of an epic poem to Fingal, becauſe it is not in every little particular, exactly conformable to the practice of Homer and Virgil, were the

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mere ſqueamiſhneſs and pedantry of criticiſm. Examined even according to Ariſtotle's rules, it will be found to have all the eſſential requiſites of a true and regular epic; and to have ſeveral of them in ſo high a degree, as at firſt view to raiſe our aſtoniſhment on finding Oſſian's compoſition ſo agreeable to rules of which he was entirely ignorant. But our aſtoniſhment will ceaſe, when we conſider from what ſource Ariſtotle drew thoſe rules. Homer knew no more of the laws of criticiſm than Oſſian. But guided by nature, he compoſed in verſe a regular ſtory, founded on heroic actions, which all poſterity admired. Ariſtotle, with great ſagacity and penetration, traced the cauſes of this general admiration. He obſerved what it was in Homer's compoſition, and in the conduct of his ſtory, which gave it ſuch power to pleaſe; from this obſervation he deduced the rules which poets ought to follow, who would write and pleaſe like Homer; and to a compoſition formed according to ſuch rules, he gave the name of an epic poem. Hence his whole ſyſtem aroſe. Ariſtotle ſtudied nature in Homer. Homer and Oſſian both wrote from nature. No wonder that among all the three, there ſhould be ſuch agreement and conformity.

The fundamental rules delivered by Ariſtotle concerning an epic poem, are theſe: That the action which is the ground work of the poem, ſhould be one, compleat, and great; that it ſhould be feigned, not merely hiſtorical; that it ſhould be enlivened with characters and manners; and heightened by the marvellous.

But before entering on any of theſe, it may perhaps be aſked, what is the moral of Fingal? For, according to M. Boſſu, an epic poem is no other than an allegory contrived to illuſtrate ſome moral truth. The poet, ſays this critic, muſt begin with fixing on ſome maxim, or inſtruction, which he intends to inculcate on mankind. He next forms a fable, like one of Æſop's, wholly with a view to the moral; and having thus ſettled and arranged his plan, he then looks into traditionary hiſtory for names and incidents, to give his fable ſome air of probability. Never did a more frigid, pedantic notion, enter into the mind of a critic. We may ſafely pronounce, that he who ſhould compoſe an epic poem after this manner, who ſhould firſt lay down a moral and contrive a plan, before he had thought of his perſonages and actors, might deliver indeed very

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ſound inſtruction, but would find few readers. There cannot be the leaſt doubt that the firſt object which ſtrikes an epic poet, which fires his genius, and gives him any idea of his work, is the action or ſubject he is to celebrate. Hardly is there any tale, any ſubject a poet can chuſe for ſuch a work, but will afford ſome general moral inſtruction. An epic poem is by its nature one of the moſt moral of all poetical compoſitions: But its moral tendency is by no means to be limited to ſome common-place maxim, which may be gathered from the ſtory. It ariſes from the admiration of heroic actions, which ſuch a compoſition is peculiarly calculated to produce; from the virtuous emotions which the characters and incidents raiſe, whilſt we read it; from the happy impreſſion which all the parts ſeparately, as well as the whole taken together, leave upon the mind. However, if a general moral be ſtill inſiſted on, Fingal obviouſly furniſhes one, not inferior to that of any other Poet, viz. That Wiſdom and Bravery always triumph over brutal force; or another nobler ſtill; That the moſt compleat victory over an enemy is obtained by that moderation and generoſity which convert him into a friend.

The unity of the Epic action, which, of all Ariſtotle's rules, is the chief and moſt material, is ſo ſtrictly preſerved in Fingal, that it muſt be perceived by every reader. It is a more compleat unity than what ariſes from relating the actions of one man, which the Greek critic juſtly cenſures as imperfect; it is the unity of one enterpriſe, the deliverance of Ireland from the invaſion of Swaran: An enterpriſe, which has ſurely the full Heroic dignity. All the incidents recorded bear a conſtant reference to one end; no double plot is carried on; but the parts unite into a regular whole: And as the action is one and great, ſo it is an entire or compleat action. For we find, as the Critic farther requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; a Nodus, or intrigue in the Poem; Difficulties occurring through Cuchullin's raſhneſs and bad ſucceſs; thoſe difficulties gradually ſurmounted; and at laſt the work conducted to that happy concluſion which is held eſſential to Epic Poetry. Unity is indeed obſerved with greater exactneſs in Fingal, than in almoſt any other Epic compoſition. For not only is unity of ſubject maintained, but that of time and place alſo. The Autumn is clearly pointed out as the ſeaſon of the action; and from begin-

ning to end the ſcene is never ſhifted from the heath of Lena, along the ſea-ſhore. The duration of the action in Fingal, is much ſhorter than in the Iliad or Æneid. But ſure, there may be ſhorter as well as longer Heroic Poems; and if the authority of Ariſtotle be alſo required for this, he ſays expreſly that the Epic compoſition is indefinite as to the time of its duration. Accordingly the Action of the Iliad laſts only forty-ſeven days, whilſt that of the Æneid is continued for more than a year.

Throughout the whole of Fingal, there reigns that grandeur of ſentiment, ſtyle and imagery, which ought ever to diſtinguiſh this high ſpecies of poetry. The ſtory is conducted with no ſmall art. The Poet goes not back to a tedious recital of the beginning of the war with Swaran; but haſtening to the main action, he falls in exactly, by a moſt happy coincidence of thought, with the rule of Horace.

> Semper ad eventum feſtinat, & in medias res,
> Non ſecus ac notas, auditorem rapit——
> Nec gemino bellum Trojanum orditur ab ovo.
>
> De Arte Poet.

He invokes no muſe, for he acknowledged none; but his occaſional addreſſes to Malvina, have a finer effect than the invocation of any muſe. He ſets out with no formal propoſition of his ſubject; but the ſubject naturally and eaſily unfolds its ſelf; the poem opening in an animated manner, with the ſituation of Cuchullin, and the arrival of a ſcout who informs him of Swaran's landing. Mention is preſently made of Fingal, and of the expected aſſiſtance from the ſhips of the lonely iſle, in order to give further light to the ſubject. For the poet often ſhows his addreſs in gradually preparing us for the events he is to introduce; and in particular the preparation for the appearance of Fingal, the previous expectations that are raiſed, and the extreme magnificence fully anſwering theſe expectations, with which the hero is at length preſented to us, are all worked up with ſuch ſkillful conduct as would do honour to any poet of the moſt refined times. Homer's art in magnifying the character of Achilles has been univerſally admired. Oſſian certainly ſhows no leſs art in aggrandizing Fingal. Nothing could be more

more happily imagined for this purpoſe than the whole management of the laſt battle, wherein Gaul the ſon of Morni, had beſought Fingal to retire, and to leave to him and his other chiefs the honour of the day. The generoſity of the King in agreeing to this propoſal; the majeſty with which he retreats to the hill, from whence he was to behold the engagement, attended by his Bards, and waving the lightning of his ſword; his perceiving the chiefs overpowered by numbers, but loth to deprive them of the glory of victory by coming in perſon to their aſſiſtance; his ſending Ullin, the Bard, to animate their courage; and at laſt, when the danger becomes more preſſing, his riſing in his might, and interpoſing, like a divinity, to decide the doubtful fate of the day; are all circumſtances contrived with ſo much art as plainly diſcover the Celtic Bards to have been not unpractiſed in Heroic poetry.

The ſtory which is the foundation of the Iliad is in itſelf as ſimple as that of Fingal. A quarrel ariſes between Achilles and Agamemnon concerning a female ſlave; on which, Achilles, apprehending himſelf to be injured, withdraws his aſſiſtance from the reſt of the Greeks. The Greeks fall into great diſtreſs, and beſeech him to be reconciled to them. He refuſes to fight for them in perſon, but ſends his friend Patroclus; and upon his being ſlain, goes forth to revenge his death, and kills Hector. The ſubject of Fingal is this: Swaran comes to invade Ireland: Cuchullin, the guardian of the young King, had applied for aſſiſtance to Fingal, who reigned in the oppoſite coaſt of Scotland. But before Fingal's arrival, he is hurried by raſh counſel to encounter Swaran. He is defeated; he retreats; and deſponds. Fingal arrives in this conjuncture. The battle is for ſome time dubious; but in the end he conquers Swaran; and the remembrance of Swaran's being the brother of Agandecca, who had once ſaved his life, makes him diſmiſs him honourably. Homer it is true has filled up his ſtory with a much greater variety of particulars than Oſſian; and in this has ſhown a compaſs of invention ſuperior to that of the other poet. But it muſt not be forgotten, that though Homer be more circumſtantial, his incidents however are leſs diverſified in kind than thoſe of Oſſian. War and bloodſhed reign throughout the Iliad; and notwithſtanding all the fertility of Homer's invention, there is ſo much uniformity in his ſubjects, that there are few readers, who, before the cloſe, are not tired of perpetual

fighting. Whereas in Oſſian, the mind is relieved by a more agreeable diverſity. There is a finer mixture of war and heroiſm, with love and friendſhip, of martial, with tender ſcenes, than is to be met with, perhaps, in any other poet. The Epiſodes too, have great propriety; as natural, and proper to that age and country: conſiſting of the ſongs of Bards, which are known to have been the great entertainment of the Celtic heroes in war, as well as in peace. Theſe ſongs are not introduced at random; if you except the Epiſode of Duchommar and Morna, in the firſt book, which, though beautiful, is more unartful, than any of the reſt, they have always ſome particular relation to the actor who is intereſted, or to the events which are going on; and, whilſt they vary the ſcene, they preſerve a ſufficient connection with the main ſubject, by the fitneſs and propriety of their introduction.

As Fingal's love to Agandecca, influences ſome circumſtances of the Poem, particularly the honourable diſmiſſion of Swaran at the end; it was neceſſary that we ſhould be let into this part of the hero's ſtory. But as it lay without the compaſs of the preſent action, it could be regularly introduced no where, except in an Epiſode. Accordingly the poet, with as much propriety, as if Ariſtotle himſelf had directed the plan, has contrived an Epiſode for this purpoſe in the ſong of Carril, at the beginning of the third book.

The concluſion of the poem is ſtrictly according to rule; and is every way noble and pleaſing. The reconciliation of the contending heroes, the conſolation of Cuchullin, and the general felicity that crowns the action, ſooth the mind in a very agreeable manner, and form that paſſage from agitation and trouble, to perfect quiet and repoſe, which critics require as the proper termination of the Epic work. "Thus they paſſed the night in ſong, and brought back "the morning with joy. Fingal aroſe on the heath; and ſhook "his glittering ſpear in his hand. He moved firſt towards the "plains of Lena; and we followed like a ridge of fire. Spread "the ſail, ſaid the King of Morven, and catch the winds that "pour from Lena.—We roſe on the wave with ſongs; and ruſhed "with joy through the foam of the ocean."—So much for the unity and general conduct of the Epic action in Fingal.

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With regard to that property of the ſubject which Ariſtotle requires that it ſhould be feigned not hiſtorical, he muſt not be underſtood ſo ſtrictly, as if he meant to exclude all ſubjects which have any foundation in truth. For ſuch excluſion would both be unreaſonable in itſelf; and what is more, would be contrary to the practice of Homer, who is known to have founded his Iliad on hiſtorical facts concerning the war of Troy, which was famous throughout all Greece. Ariſtotle means no more than that it is the buſineſs of a poet not to be a mere annaliſt of Facts, but to embelliſh truth with beautiful, probable, and uſeful fictions; to copy nature, as he himſelf explains it, like painters, who preſerve a likeneſs, but exhibit their objects more grand and beautiful than they are in reality. That Oſſian has followed this courſe, and building upon true hiſtory, has ſufficiently adorned it with poetical fiction for aggrandizing his characters and facts, will not, I believe, be queſtioned by moſt readers. At the ſame time, the foundation which thoſe facts and characters had in truth, and the ſhare which the poet himſelf had in the tranſactions which he records, muſt be conſidered as no ſmall advantage to his work. For truth makes an impreſſion on the mind far beyond any fiction; and no man, let his imagination be ever ſo ſtrong, relates any events ſo feelingly as thoſe in which he has been intereſted; paints any ſcene ſo naturally as one which he has ſeen; or draws any characters in ſuch ſtrong colours as thoſe which he has perſonally known. It is conſidered as an advantage of the Epic ſubject to be taken from a period ſo diſtant, as by being involved in the darkneſs of tradition, may give licence to fable. Though Oſſian's ſubject may at firſt view appear unfavourable in this reſpect, as being taken from his own times, yet when we reflect that he lived to an extreme old age; that he relates what had been tranſacted in another country, at the diſtance of many years, and after all that race of men who had been the actors were gone off the ſtage; we ſhall find the objection in a great meaſure obviated. In ſo rude an age, when no written records were known, when tradition was looſe, and accuracy of any kind little attended to, what was great and heroic in one generation, eaſily ripened into the marvellous in the next.

The natural repreſentation of human characters in an Epic Poem is highly eſſential to its merit: And in reſpect to this there can be no

no doubt of Homer's excelling all the heroic poets who have ever wrote. But though Oſſian be much inferior to Homer in this article, he will be found to be equal at leaſt, if not ſuperior, to Virgil; and has indeed given all the diſplay of human nature which the ſimple occurrences of his times could be expected to furniſh. No dead uniformity of character prevails in Fingal; but on the contrary the principal characters are not only clearly diſtinguiſhed, but ſometimes artfully contraſted ſo as to illuſtrate each other. Oſſian's heroes are like Homer's, all brave; but their bravery, like thoſe of Homer's too, is of different kinds. For inſtance; the prudent, the ſedate, the modeſt and circumſpect Connal, is finely oppoſed to the preſumptuous, raſh, overbearing, but gallant and generous Calmar. Calmar hurries Cuchullin into action by his temerity; and when he ſees the bad effect of his counſels, he will not ſurvive the diſgrace. Connal, like another Ulyſſes, attends Cuchullin to his retreat, counſels, and comforts him under his misfortune. The fierce, the proud, and high ſpirited Swaran is admirably contraſted with the calm, the moderate, and generous Fingal. The character of Oſcar is a favourite one throughout the whole Poems. The amiable warmth of the young warrior; his eager impetuoſity in the day of action; his paſſion for fame; his ſubmiſſion to his father; his tenderneſs for Malvina; are the ſtrokes of a maſterly pencil; the ſtrokes are few; but it is the hand of nature, and attracts the heart. Oſſian's own character, the old man, the hero, and the bard, all in one, preſents to us through the whole work a moſt reſpectable and venerable figure, which we always contemplate with pleaſure. Cuchullin is a hero of the higheſt claſs; daring, magnanimous, and exquiſitely ſenſible to honour. We become attached to his intereſt, and are deeply touched with his diſtreſs; and after the admiration raiſed for him in the firſt part of the Poem, it is a ſtrong proof of Oſſian's maſterly genius that he durſt adventure to produce to us another hero, compared with whom, even the great Cuchullin, ſhould be only an inferior perſonage; and who ſhould riſe as far above him, as Cuchullin riſes above the reſt.

Here indeed, in the character and deſcription of Fingal, Oſſian triumphs almoſt unrivalled: For we may boldly defy all antiquity to ſhew us any hero equal to Fingal. Homer's Hector poſſeſſes ſeveral great and amiable qualities; but Hector is a ſecondary perſonage

in the Iliad, not the hero of the work. We ſee him only occaſionally; we know much leſs of him than we do of Fingal; who not only in the Epic Poem, but throughout the reſt of Oſſian's works, is preſented in all that variety of lights, which give the full diſplay of a character. And though Hector faithfully diſcharges his duty to his country, his friends, and his family, he is tinctured, however, with a degree of the ſame ſavage ferocity, which prevails among all the Homeric heroes. For we find him inſulting over the fallen Patroclus, with the moſt cruel taunts, and telling him, when he lies in the agony of death, that Achilles cannot help him now; and that in a ſhort time his body, ſtripped naked, and deprived of funeral honours, ſhall be devoured by the Vultures*. Whereas in the character of Fingal, concur almoſt all the qualities that can ennoble human nature; that can either make us admire the hero, or love the man. He is not only unconquerable in war, but he makes his people happy by his wiſdom in the days of peace †. He is truly the father of his people. He is known by the epithet of "Fingal of the mildeſt look;" and diſtinguiſhed on every occaſion, by humanity and generoſity. He is merciful to his foes ‡; full of affection to his children; full of concern about his friends; and never mentions Agandecca, his firſt love, without the utmoſt tenderneſs. He is the univerſal protector of the diſtreſſed; "None "ever went ſad from Fingal ‖."——"O Oſcar! bend the ſtrong "in arms; but ſpare the feeble hand. Be thou a ſtream of many "tides againſt the foes of thy people; but like the gale that moves "the graſs, to thoſe who aſk thine aid. So Trenmor lived; ſuch "Trathal was; and ſuch has Fingal been. My arm was the ſup"port of the injured; the weak reſted behind the lightning of my "ſteel §."—Theſe were the maxims of true heroiſm, to which he formed his grandſon. His fame is repreſented as every where

* Iliad 16. 830. Il. 17. 127.

† P. 62.

‡ When he commands his ſons, after Swaran is taken priſoner, to "purſue "the reſt of Lochlin, over the heath of "Lena; that no veſſel may hereafter "bound on the dark-rolling waves of "Iniſtore;" he means not aſſuredly, as ſome have miſrepreſented him, to order a general ſlaughter of the foes, and to prevent their ſaving themſelves by flight; but, like a wiſe general, he commands his chiefs to render the victory compleat, by a total rout of the enemy; that they might adventure no more for the future, to ſit out any fleet againſt him or his allies.

‖ P. 74. § P. 44.

ſpread;

ſpread; the greateſt heroes acknowledge his ſuperiority; his enemies tremble at his name; and the higheſt encomium that can be beſtowed on one whom the poet would moſt exalt, is to ſay, that his ſoul was like the ſoul of Fingal.

To do juſtice to the poet's merit, in ſupporting ſuch a character as this, I muſt obſerve, what is not commonly attended to, that there is no part of poetical execution more difficult, than to draw a perfect character in ſuch a manner, as to render it diſtinct and affecting to the mind. Some ſtrokes of human imperfection and frailty, are what uſually give us the moſt clear view, and the moſt ſenſible impreſſion of a character; becauſe they preſent to us a man, ſuch as we have ſeen; they recall known features of human nature. When poets attempt to go beyond this range, and deſcribe a faultleſs hero, they, for the moſt part, ſet before us, a ſort of vague undiſtinguiſhable character, ſuch as the imagination cannot lay hold of, or realize to itſelf, as the object of affection. We know how much Virgil has failed in this particular. His perfect hero, Æneas, is an unanimated, inſipid perſonage, whom we may pretend to admire, but whom no one can heartily love. But what Virgil has failed in, Oſſian, to our aſtoniſhment, has ſucceſsfully executed. His Fingal, though exhibited without any of the common human failings, is nevertheleſs a real man; a character which touches and intereſts every reader. To this it has much contributed, that the poet has repreſented him as an old man; and by this has gained the advantage of throwing around him a great many circumſtances, peculiar to that age, which paint him to the fancy in a more diſtinct light. He is ſurrounded with his family; he inſtructs his children in the principles of virtue; he is narrative of his paſt exploits; he is venerable with the grey locks of age; he is frequently diſpoſed to moralize, like an old man, on human vanity and the proſpect of death. There is more art, at leaſt more felicity, in this, than may at firſt be imagined. For youth and old age, are the two ſtates of human life, capable of being placed in the moſt pictureſque lights. Middle age is more general and vague; and has fewer circumſtances peculiar to the idea of it. And when any object is in a ſituation, that admits it to be rendered particular, and to be cloathed with a variety of circumſtances, it always ſtands out more clear and full in poetical deſcription.

Beſides

Beſides human perſonages, divine or ſupernatural agents are often introduced into epic poetry; forming what is called the machinery of it; which moſt critics hold to be an eſſential part. The marvellous, it muſt be admitted, has always a great charm for the bulk of readers. It gratifies the imagination, and affords room for ſtriking and ſublime deſcription. No wonder therefore, that all poets ſhould have a ſtrong propenſity towards it. But I muſt obſerve, that nothing is more difficult, than to adjuſt properly the marvellous with the probable. If a poet ſacrifice probability, and fill his work, as Taſſo has done, with extravagant ſupernatural ſcenes, he ſpreads over it an appearance of romance and childiſh fiction; he tranſports his readers from this world, into a phantaſtick, viſionary region; and loſes that weight and dignity which ſhould reign in epic poetry. No work, from which probability is altogether baniſhed, can make a laſting or deep impreſſion. Human actions and manners, are always the moſt intereſting objects which can be preſented to a human mind. All machinery, therefore, is faulty which withdraws theſe too much from view; or obſcures them under a cloud of incredible fictions. Beſides being temperately employed, machinery ought always to have ſome foundation in popular belief. A poet is by no means at liberty to invent what ſyſtem of the marvellous he pleaſes: He muſt avail himſelf either of the religious faith, or the ſuperſtitious credulity of the country wherein he lives; ſo as to give an air of probability to events which are moſt contrary to the common courſe of nature.

In theſe reſpects, Oſſian appears to me to have been remarkably happy. He has indeed followed the ſame courſe with Homer. For it is perfectly abſurd to imagine, as ſome critics have done, that Homer's mythology was invented by him, in conſequence of profound reflections on the benefit it would yield to poetry. Homer was no ſuch refining genius. He found the traditionary ſtories on which he built his Iliad, mingled with popular legends, concerning the intervention of the gods; and he adopted theſe, becauſe they amuſed the fancy. Oſſian, in like manner, found the tales of his country full of ghoſts and ſpirits: It is likely he believed them himſelf; and he introduced them, becauſe they gave his poems that ſolemn and marvellous caſt, which ſuited his genius. This was

the only machinery he could employ with propriety; becauſe it was the only intervention of ſupernatural beings, which agreed with the common belief of the country. It was happy; becauſe it did not interfere in the leaſt, with the proper diſplay of human characters and actions; becauſe it had leſs of the incredible, than moſt other kinds of poetical machinery; and becauſe it ſerved to diverſify the ſcene, and to heighten the ſubject by an awful grandeur, which is the great deſign of machinery.

As Oſſian's mythology is peculiar to himſelf, and makes a conſiderable figure in his other poems, as well as in Fingal, it may be proper to make ſome obſervations on it, independent of its ſubſerviency to epic compoſition. It turns for the moſt part on the appearances of departed ſpirits. Theſe, conſonantly to the notions of every rude age, are repreſented not as purely immaterial, but as thin airy forms, which can be viſible or inviſible at pleaſure; their voice is feeble; their arm is weak; but they are endowed with knowledge more than human. In a ſeparate ſtate, they retain the ſame diſpoſitions which animated them in this life. They ride on the wind; they bend their airy bows; and purſue deer formed of clouds. The ghoſts of departed bards continue to ſing. The ghoſts of departed heroes frequent the fields of their former fame. "They reſt together in their caves, and talk of mortal men. "Their ſongs are of other worlds. They come ſometimes to the "ear of reſt, and raiſe their feeble voice *." All this preſents to us much the ſame ſet of ideas, concerning ſpirits, as we find in the eleventh book of the Odyſſey, where Ulyſſes viſits the regions of the dead: And in the twenty-third book of the Iliad, the ghoſt of Patroclus, after appearing to Achilles, vaniſhes preciſely like one of Oſſian's, emitting a ſhrill, feeble cry, and melting away like ſmoke.

But though Homer's and Oſſian's ideas concerning ghoſts were of the ſame nature, we cannot but obſerve, that Oſſian's ghoſts are drawn with much ſtronger and livelier colours than thoſe of Homer. Oſſian deſcribes ghoſts with all the particularity of one who had ſeen and converſed with them, and whoſe imagination was full of

* See P. 24, 27, 103, 107, 218, 254.

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the impreſſion they had left upon it. He calls up thoſe awful and tremendous ideas which the

—— Simulacra modis pallentia miris,

are fitted to raiſe in the human mind; and which, in Shakeſpear's ſtyle, "harrow up the ſoul." Crugal's ghoſt, in particular, in the beginning of the ſecond book of Fingal, may vie with any appearance of this kind, deſcribed by any epic or tragic poet whatever. Moſt poets would have contented themſelves with telling us, that he reſembled, in every particular, the living Crugal; that his form and dreſs were the ſame, only his face more pale and ſad; and that he bore the mark of the wound by which he fell. But Oſſian ſets before our eyes a ſpirit from the inviſible world; diſtinguiſhed by all thoſe features, which a ſtrong aſtoniſhed imagination would give to a ghoſt. "A dark-red ſtream of fire comes down from the hill. "Crugal ſat upon the beam; he that lately fell by the hand of "Swaran, ſtriving in the battle of heroes. His face is like the "beam of the ſetting moon. His robes are of the clouds of the "hill. His eyes are like two decaying flames. Dark is the wound "of his breaſt.——The ſtars dim-twinkled through his form; "and his voice was like the ſound of a diſtant ſtream." The circumſtance of the ſtars being beheld, "dim-twinkling through his "form," is wonderfully picturesque; and conveys the moſt lively impreſſion of his thin and ſhadowy ſubſtance. The attitude in which he is afterwards placed, and the ſpeech put into his mouth, are full of that ſolemn and awful ſublimity, which ſuits the ſubject. "Dim, and in tears, he ſtood and ſtretched his pale hand over "the hero. Faintly he raiſed his feeble voice, like the gale of the "reedy Lego.—My ghoſt, O Connal! is on my native hills; but "my corſe is on the ſands of Ullin. Thou ſhalt never talk with "Crugal, or find his lone ſteps in the heath. I am light as the "blaſt of Cromla; and I move like the ſhadow of miſt. Connal, "ſon of Colgar! I ſee the dark cloud of death. It hovers over the "plains of Lena. The ſons of green Erin ſhall fall. Remove "from the field of ghoſts.—Like the darkened moon he retired, in "the midſt of the whiſtling blaſt."

Several other appearances of ſpirits might be pointed out, as among the moſt ſublime paſſages of Oſſian's poetry. The circumſtances of them are conſiderably diverſified; and the ſcenery always ſuited to the occaſion. "Oſcar ſlowly aſcends the hill. The me-" teors of night ſet on the heath before him. A diſtant torrent " faintly roars. Unfrequent blaſts ruſh through aged oaks. The " half-enlightened moon ſinks dim and red behind her hill. Fee-" ble voices are heard on the heath. Oſcar drew his ſword."—— Nothing can prepare the fancy more happily for the awful ſcene that is to follow. "Trenmor came from his hill, at the voice of his " mighty ſon. A cloud, like the ſteed of the ſtranger, ſupported " his airy limbs. His robe is of the miſt of Lano, that brings " death to the people. His ſword is a green meteor, half-extin-" guiſhed. His face is without form, and dark. He ſighed thrice " over the hero: And thrice, the winds of the night roared " around. Many were his words to Oſcar——He ſlowly va-" niſhed, like a miſt that melts on the ſunny hill *." To appearances of this kind, we can find no parallel among the Greek or Roman poets. They bring to mind that noble deſcription in the book of Job: "In thoughts from the viſions of the night, when " deep ſleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, " which made all my bones to ſhake. Then a ſpirit paſſed before " my face. The hair of my fleſh ſtood up. It ſtood ſtill; but I " could not diſcern the form thereof. An image was before mine " eyes. There was ſilence; and I heard a voice—Shall mortal " man be more juſt than God?" †

As Oſſian's ſupernatural beings are deſcribed with a ſurprizing force of imagination, ſo they are introduced with propriety. We have only three ghoſts in Fingal: That of Crugal, which comes to warn the hoſt of impending deſtruction, and to adviſe them to ſave themſelves by retreat; that of Evirallin, the ſpouſe of Oſſian, which calls him to riſe and reſcue their ſon from danger; and that of Agandecca, which, juſt before the laſt engagement with Swaran, moves Fingal to pity, by mourning for the approaching deſtruction of her kinſmen and people. In the other poems, ghoſts ſometimes appear when invoked to foretell futurity; frequently, according to

* P. 100, 101. † Job iv. 13---17.

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the notions of theſe times, they come as fore-runners of misfortune or death, to thoſe whom they viſit; ſometimes they inform their friends at a diſtance, of their own death; and ſometimes they are introduced to heighten the ſcenery on ſome great and ſolemn occaſion. "A hundred oaks burn to the wind; and faint light gleams "over the heath. The ghoſts of Ardven paſs through the beam; "and ſhew their dim and diſtant forms. Comala is half-unſeen on "her meteor; and Hidallan is ſullen and dim *."——"The awful "faces of other times, looked from the clouds of Crona." †—— "Fercuth! I ſaw the ghoſt of night. Silent he ſtood on that "bank; his robe of miſt flew on the wind. I could behold his "tears. An aged man he ſeemed, and full of thought ‡."

The ghoſts of ſtrangers mingle not with thoſe of the natives. "She is ſeen; but not like the daughters of the hill. Her robes "are from the ſtrangers land; and ſhe is ſtill alone §." When the ghoſt of one whom we had formerly known is introduced, the propriety of the living character is ſtill preſerved. This is remarkable in the appearance of Calmar's ghoſt, in the poem entitled The Death of Cuchullin. He ſeems to forebode Cuchullin's death, and to beckon him to his cave. Cuchullin reproaches him for ſuppoſing that he could be intimidated by ſuch prognoſtics. "Why doſt thou bend thy dark eyes on me, ghoſt of the car-"borne Calmar! Would'ſt thou frighten me, O Matha's ſon! "from the battles of Cormac? Thy hand was not feeble in war; "neither was thy voice for peace. How art thou changed, chief "of Lara! if now thou doſt adviſe to fly! — Retire thou to thy "cave: Thou art not Calmar's ghoſt: He delighted in battle; and "his arm was like the thunder of heaven." Calmar makes no return to this ſeeming reproach: But, "He retired in his blaſt "with joy; for he had heard the voice of his praiſe ‖." This is preciſely the ghoſt of Achilles in Homer; who, notwithſtanding all the diſſatisfaction he expreſſes with his ſtate in the region of the dead, as ſoon as he had heard his ſon Neoptolemus praiſed for his gallant behaviour, ſtrode away with ſilent joy to rejoin the reſt of the ſhades ¶.

* P. 97. † P. 88. ‡ P. 123. § P. 140.
‖ P. 150. ¶ Odyſſ. Lib. 11.

It is a great advantage of Oſſian's mythology, that it is not local and temporary, like that of moſt other ancient poets; which of courſe is apt to ſeem ridiculous, after the ſuperſtitions have paſſed away on which it was founded. Oſſian's mythology is, to ſpeak ſo, the mythology of human nature; for it is founded on what has been the popular belief, in all ages and countries, and under all forms of religion, concerning the appearances of departed ſpirits. Homer's machinery is always lively and amuſing; but far from being always ſupported with proper dignity. The indecent ſquabbles among his gods, ſurely do no honour to epic poetry. Whereas Oſſian's machinery has dignity upon all occaſions. It is indeed a dignity of the dark and awful kind; but this is proper; becauſe coincident with the ſtrain and ſpirit of the poetry. A light and gay mythology, like Homer's, would have been perfectly unſuitable to the ſubjects on which Oſſian's genius was employed. But though his machinery be always ſolemn, it is not, however, always dreary or diſmal; it is enlivened, as much as the ſubject would permit, by thoſe pleaſant and beautiful appearances, which he ſometimes introduces, of the ſpirits of the hill. Theſe are gentle ſpirits; deſcending on ſun-beams; fair-moving on the plain; their forms white and bright; their voices ſweet; and their viſits to men propitious. The greateſt praiſe that can be given, to the beauty of a living woman, is to ſay, "She is fair as the ghoſt of the hill; when "it moves in a ſun-beam at noon, over the ſilence of Morven *." ——"The hunter ſhall hear my voice from his booth. He ſhall "fear, but love my voice. For ſweet ſhall my voice be for my "friends; for pleaſant were they to me †."

Beſides ghoſts, or the ſpirits of departed men, we find in Oſſian ſome inſtances of other kinds of machinery. Spirits of a ſuperior nature to ghoſts, ſeem to be ſometimes alluded to, which have power to embroil the deep; to call forth winds and ſtorms, and pour them on the land of the ſtranger; to overturn foreſts, and to ſend death among the people ‡. We have prodigies too; a ſhower of blood; and when ſome diſaſter is befalling at a diſtance, the ſound of death heard on the ſtrings of Oſſian's harp §: all per-

* P. 14. † P. 212. ‡ Vid. P. 39, 114, 13, 102, 180.
§ P. 133, 168.

fectly

fectly conſonant, not only to the peculiar ideas of northern nations, but to the general current of a ſuperſtitious imagination in all countries. The deſcription of Fingal's airy hall, in the poem called Berrathon, and the aſcent of Malvina into it, deſerves particular notice, as remarkably noble and magnificent. But above all, the engagement of Fingal with the ſpirit of Loda, in Carric-thura, cannot be mentioned without admiration. I forbear tranſcribing the paſſage, as it muſt have drawn the attention of every one who has read the works of Oſſian. The undaunted courage of Fingal, oppoſed to all the terrors of the Scandinavian god; the appearance and the ſpeech of that awful ſpirit; the wound which he receives, and the ſhriek which he ſends forth, "as rolled into himſelf, he roſe "upon the wind;" are full of the moſt amazing and terrible majeſty. I know no paſſage more ſublime in the writings of any uninſpired author. The fiction is calculated to aggrandize the hero; which it does to a high degree; nor is it ſo unnatural or wild a fiction, as might at firſt be thought. According to the notions of thoſe times, ſupernatural beings were material, and conſequently, vulnerable. The ſpirit of Loda was not acknowledged as a deity by Fingal; he did not worſhip at the ſtone of his power; he plainly conſidered him as the God of his enemies only; as a local Deity, whoſe dominion extended no farther than to the regions where he was worſhiped; who had, therefore, no title to threaten him, and no claim to his ſubmiſſion. We know there are poetical precedents of great authority, for fictions fully as extravagant; and if Homer be forgiven for making Diomed attack and wound in battle, the gods whom that chief himſelf worſhiped, Oſſian ſurely is pardonable for making his hero ſuperior to the god of a foreign territory †.

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† The ſcene of this encounter of Fingal with the ſpirit of Loda is laid in Iniſtore, or the iſlands of Orkney; and in the deſcription of Fingal's landing there, it is ſaid, p. 198. "A rock bends along the coaſt "with all its echoing wood. On the top "is the circle of Loda, with the moſſy "ſtone of power." In confirmation of Oſſian's topography, it is proper to acquaint the reader that in theſe iſlands, as I have been well informed, there are many pillars, and circles of ſtones, ſtill remaining, known by the name of the ſtones and circles of Loda, or Loden; to which ſome degree of ſuperſtitious regard is annexed to this day. Theſe iſlands, until the year 1468, made a part of the Daniſh dominions. Their ancient language, of which there are yet ſome remains among the natives, is called the Norſe;

Notwithſtanding the poetical advantages which I have aſcribed to Oſſian's machinery, I acknowledge it would have been much more beautiful and perfect, had the author diſcovered ſome knowledge of a ſupream Being. Although his ſilence on this head has been accounted for by the learned and ingenious tranſlator in a very probable manner, yet ſtill it muſt be held a conſiderable diſadvantage to the poetry. For the moſt auguſt and lofty ideas that can embelliſh poetry are derived from the belief of a divine adminiſtration of the univerſe: And hence the invocation of a ſupream Being, or at leaſt of ſome ſuperior powers who are conceived as preſiding over human affairs, the ſolemnities of religious worſhip, prayers preferred, and aſſiſtance implored on critical occaſions, appear with great dignity in the works of almoſt all poets as chief ornaments of their compoſitions. The abſence of all ſuch religious ideas from Oſſian's poetry, is a ſenſible blank in it; the more to be regretted, as we can eaſily imagine what an illuſtrious figure they would have made under the management of ſuch a genius as his; and how finely they would have been adapted to many ſituations which occur in his works.

The high merit of Fingal, as an Epic Poem, required a particular diſcuſſion. But though the art ſhown in conducting a work of ſuch length diſtinguiſhes it above the other poems in this collection, theſe, however, contain particular beauties equal, perhaps ſuperior, to any in Fingal. They are hiſtorical poems, generally of the elegiac kind; and plainly diſcover themſelves to be the work of the ſame author. One conſiſtent face of manners is every where preſented to us; one ſpirit of poetry reigns; the maſterly hand of Oſſian appears throughout; the ſame rapid and animated ſtyle; the ſame ſtrong colouring of imagination, and the ſame glowing ſenſibility of heart. Beſides the unity which belongs to the compoſitions of one man, there is moreover a certain unity of ſubject which

and is a dialect, not of the Celtic, but of the Scandinavian tongue. The manners and the ſuperſtitions of the inhabitants, are quite diſtinct from thoſe of the Highlands and weſtern iſles of Scotland. Their ancient ſongs too, are of a different ſtrain and character, turning upon magical incantations and evocations from the dead, which were the favourite ſubjects of the old Runic poetry. They have many traditions among them of wars in former times with the inhabitants of the weſtern iſlands.

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very happily connects all theſe poems. They form the poetical hiſtory of the age of Fingal. The ſame race of heroes whom we had met with in the Epic poem, Cuchullin, Oſcar, Connal and Gaul return again upon the ſtage; and Fingal himſelf is always the principal figure, preſented on every occaſion, with equal magnificence, nay riſing upon us to the laſt. The circumſtances of Oſſian's old age and blindneſs, his ſurviving all his friends, and his relating their great exploits to Malvina, the ſpouſe or miſtreſs of his beloved ſon Oſcar, furniſh the fineſt poetical ſituations that fancy could deviſe for that tender pathetic which reigns in Oſſian's poetry.

As each of theſe poems have their particular merit, there might be room for examining them ſeparately, and for ſhowing, in many inſtances, what art there is in the conduct and diſpoſition of the incidents, as well as what beauty in the deſcriptions and ſentiments. Carthon is a regular and highly finiſhed piece. The main ſtory is very properly introduced by Cleſſammor's relation of the adventure of his youth; and this introduction is finely heightened by Fingal's ſong of mourning over Moina; in which Oſſian, ever fond of doing honour to his father, has contrived to diſtinguiſh him, for being an eminent poet, as well as warrior. Fingal's ſong upon this occaſion, when "his thouſand Bards leaned forwards from their "ſeats, to hear the voice of the King," is inferior to no paſſage in the whole book; and with great judgment put in his mouth, as the ſerioufneſs, no leſs than the ſublimity of the ſtrain, is peculiarly ſuited to the Hero's character. Temora is the opening of an Epic Poem, which appears to be equal in every reſpect to Fingal. The contraſt between the characters of Cathmar and Cairbar, the death of Oſcar, and the aſſaſſination of the young prince Cormac, are ſuch intereſting ſcenes, as give the greateſt reaſon to wiſh the recovery of the ſequel. In Darthula are aſſembled almoſt all the tender images that can touch the heart of man: Friendſhip, love, the affections of parents, ſons, and brothers, the diſtreſs of the aged, and the unavailing bravery of the young. The beautiful addreſs to the moon, with which the poem opens, and the tranſition from thence to the ſubject, moſt happily prepare the mind for that train of affecting events that is to follow. The ſtory is regular, dramatic, intereſting to the laſt. He who can read it without emotion may congratulate himſelf, if he pleaſes, upon being completely

armed againſt ſympathetic ſorrow. As Fingal had no occaſion of appearing in the action of this poem, Oſſian makes a very artful tranſition from his narration, to what was paſſing in the halls of Selma. The ſound heard there on the ſtrings of his harp, the concern which Fingal ſhows on hearing it, and the invocation of the ghoſts of their fathers, to receive the Heroes falling in a diſtant land, are introduced with great beauty of imagination to increaſe the ſolemnity, and to diverſify the ſcenery of the poem.

Carric-thura is full of the moſt ſublime dignity; and has this advantage of being more chearful in the ſubject, and more happy in the cataſtrophe than moſt of the other poems: Though tempered at the ſame time with epiſodes in that ſtrain of tender melancholy, which ſeems to have been the great delight of Oſſian and the Bards of his age. Lathmon is peculiarly diſtinguiſhed, by high generoſity of ſentiment. This is carried ſo far, particularly in the refuſal of Gaul, on one ſide, to take the advantage of a ſleeping foe; and of Lathmon, on the other, to overpower by numbers the two young warriors, as to recall into one's mind the manners of Chivalry; ſome reſemblance to which may perhaps be ſuggeſted by other incidents in this collection of Poems. Chivalry, however, took riſe in an age and country too remote from thoſe of Oſſian to admit the ſuſpicion that the one could have borrowed any thing from the other. So far as Chivalry had any real exiſtence, the ſame military enthuſiaſm, which gave birth to it in the feudal times, might, in the days of Oſſian, that is, in the infancy of a riſing ſtate, through the operation of the ſame cauſe, very naturally produce effects of the ſame kind on the minds and manners of men. So far as Chivalry was an ideal ſyſtem exiſting only in romance, it will not be thought ſurpriſing, when we reflect on the account before given of the Celtic Bards, that this imaginary refinement of heroic manners ſhould be found among them, as much, at leaſt, as among the *Trobadores*, or ſtrolling Provençal Bards, in the 10th or 11th century; whoſe ſongs, it is ſaid, firſt gave riſe to thoſe romantic ideas of heroiſm, which for ſo long a time enchanted Europe †. Oſſian's heroes have all the gallantry

† Vid. Huetius de origine fabularum Romanenſium.

and generoſity of thoſe fabulous knights, without their extravagance; and his love ſcenes have native tenderneſs, without any mixture of thoſe forced and unnatural conceits which abound in the old romances. The adventures related by our poet which reſemble the moſt thoſe of romance, concern women who follow their lovers to war diſguiſed in the armour of men; and theſe are ſo managed as to produce, in the diſcovery, ſeveral of the moſt intereſting ſituations; one beautiful inſtance of which may be ſeen in Carric-thura, and another in Calthon and Colmal.

Oithona preſents a ſituation of a different nature. In the abſence of her lover Gaul, ſhe had been carried off and raviſhed by Dunrommath. Gaul diſcovers the place where ſhe is concealed, and comes to revenge her. The meeting of the two lovers, the ſentiments and the behaviour of Oithona on that occaſion, are deſcribed with ſuch tender and exquiſite propriety, as does the greateſt honour both to the art and to the delicacy of our author; and would have been admired in any poet of the moſt refined age. The conduct of Croma muſt ſtrike every reader as remarkably judicious and beautiful. We are to be prepared for the death of Malvina, which is related in the ſucceeding Poem. She is therefore introduced in perſon; "ſhe has heard a voice in a dream; ſhe feels the flut-"tering of her ſoul;" and in a moſt moving lamentation addreſſed to her beloved Oſcar, ſhe ſings her own Death Song. Nothing could be calculated with more art to ſooth and comfort her, than the ſtory which Oſſian relates. In the young and brave Fovargormo, another Oſcar is introduced; his praiſes are ſung; and the happineſs is ſet before her of thoſe who die in their youth, "when their renown is around them; before the feeble behold "them in the hall, and ſmile at their trembling hands."

But no where does Oſſian's genius appear to greater advantage, than in the concluding poem of the whole collection, "The laſt "ſound of the Voice of Cona."

> Qualis olor noto poſiturus littore vitam,
> Ingemit, et mæſtis mulcens concentibus auras
> Præſago queritur venientia funera cantu.

The whole train of ideas is admirably ſuited to the ſubject. Every thing is full of that inviſible world, into which the aged Bard believes himſelf now ready to enter. The airy hall of Fingal preſents itſelf to his view; "he ſees the cloud that ſhall receive his ghoſt; "he beholds the miſt that ſhall form his robe when he appears on "his hill;" and all the natural objects around him ſeem to carry the preſages of death. "The thiſtle ſhakes its beard to the wind. "The flower hangs its heavy head—it ſeems to ſay, I am covered "with the drops of heaven; the time of my departure is near, "and the blaſt that ſhall ſcatter my leaves." Malvina's death is hinted to him in the moſt delicate manner by the ſon of Alpin. His lamentation over her, her apotheoſis, or aſcent to the habitation of heroes, and the introduction to the ſtory which follows from the mention which Oſſian ſuppoſes the father of Malvina to make of him in the hall of Fingal, are all in the higheſt ſpirit of Poetry. "And doſt thou remember Oſſian, O Toſcar ſon of Comloch? "The battles of our youth were many; our ſwords went together "to the field."——Nothing could be more proper than to end his ſongs with recording an exploit of the father of that Malvina, of whom his heart was now ſo full; and who, from firſt to laſt, had been ſuch a favourite object throughout all his poems.

But as a ſeparate diſcuſſion of the merit of each of the poems in this collection would lead us too far, I ſhall content myſelf with making ſome obſervations on the chief beauties of our author under the general heads of Deſcription, Imagery, and Sentiment.

A poet of original genius is always diſtinguiſhed by his talent for deſcription †. A ſecond rate writer diſcerns nothing new or peculiar in the object he means to deſcribe. His conceptions of it are vague and looſe; his expreſſions feeble; and of courſe the object is preſented to us indiſtinctly and as through a cloud. But a true Poet makes us imagine that we ſee it before our eyes: he catches the diſtinguiſhing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in ſuch a light that a painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a lively imagination, which

† See the rules of poetical deſcription excellently illuſtrated by lord Kaims, in his Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. chap. 21. Of narration and deſcription.

firſt

firſt receives a ſtrong impreſſion of the object; and then, by a proper ſelection of capital picturesque circumſtances employed in deſcribing it, tranſmits that impreſſion in its full force to the imaginations of others. That Oſſian poſſeſſes this deſcriptive power in a high degree, we have a clear proof from the effect which his deſcriptions produce upon the imaginations of thoſe who read him with any degree of attention and taſte. Few poets are more intereſting. We contract an intimate acquaintance with his principal heroes. The characters, the manners, the face of the country become familiar; we even think we could draw the figure of his ghoſts: In a word, whilſt reading him, we are tranſported as into a new region, and dwell among his objects as if they were all real.

It were eaſy to point out ſeveral inſtances of exquiſite painting in the works of our author. Such, for inſtance as the ſcenery with which Temora opens, and the attitude in which Cairbar is there preſented to us †; the deſcription of the young prince Cormac, in the ſame book ‖; and the ruins of Balclutha in Carthon ‡. "I "have ſeen the walls of Balclutha, but they were deſolate. The "fire had reſounded in the halls; and the voice of the people is "heard no more. The ſtream of Clutha was removed from its "place by the fall of the walls. The thiſtle ſhook there its lonely "head: The moſs whiſtled to the wind. The fox looked out "from the windows; the rank graſs of the wall waved round "his head. Deſolate is the dwelling of Moina; ſilence is in "the houſe of her fathers." Nothing alſo can be more natural and lively than the manner in which Carthon afterwards deſcribes how the conflagration of his city affected him when a child: "Have I not ſeen the fallen Balclutha? And ſhall I feaſt "with Comhal's ſon? Comhal! who threw his fire in the "midſt of my father's hall! I was young and knew not the cauſe "why the virgins wept. The columns of ſmoke pleaſed mine "eye, when they roſe above my walls: I often looked back "with gladneſs, when my friends fled above the hill. But when "the years of my youth came on, I beheld the moſs of my fallen "walls. My ſigh aroſe with the morning; and my tears deſcended

† P. 172, 173. ‖ P. 185. ‡ P. 132.

"with

" with night. Shall I not fight, I ſaid to my ſoul, againſt the " children of my foes? And I will fight, O Bard! I feel the " ſtrength of my ſoul †." In the ſame poem, the aſſembling of the chiefs round Fingal, who had been warned of ſome impending danger by the appearance of a prodigy, is deſcribed with ſo many picturesque circumſtances, that one imagines himſelf preſent in the aſſembly. " The king alone beheld the terrible ſight, and he " foreſaw the death of his people. He came in ſilence to his hall, " and took his father's ſpear; the mail rattled on his breaſt. The " heroes roſe around. They looked in ſilence on each other, " marking the eyes of Fingal. They ſaw the battle in his face. " ——A thouſand ſhields are placed at once on their arms; and " they drew a thouſand ſwords. The hall of Selma brightened " around. The clang of arms aſcends. The grey dogs howl in " their place. No word is among the mighty chiefs. Each " marked the eyes of the King; and half aſſumed his ſpear ‡."

It has been objected to Oſſian, that his deſcriptions of military actions are imperfect, and much leſs diverſified by circumſtances than thoſe of Homer. This is in ſome meaſure true. The amazing fertility of Homer's invention is no where ſo much diſplayed as in the incidents of his battles, and in the little hiſtory pieces he gives of the perſons ſlain. Nor indeed, with regard to the talent of deſcription, can too much be ſaid in praiſe of Homer. Every thing is alive in his writings. The colours with which he paints are thoſe of nature. But Oſſian's genius was of a different kind from Homer's. It led him to hurry towards grand objects rather than to amuſe himſelf with particulars of leſs importance. He could dwell on the death of a favorite hero; but that of a private man ſeldom ſtopped his rapid courſe. Homer's genius was more comprehenſive than Oſſian's. It included a wider circle of objects; and could work up any incident into deſcription. Oſſian's was more limited; but the region within which it chiefly exerted itſelf was the higheſt of all, the region of the pathetic and ſublime.

We muſt not imagine, however, that Oſſian's battles conſiſt only of general indiſtinct deſcription. Such beautiful incidents are

† P. 135. ‡ P. 133.

ſome-

ſometimes introduced, and the circumſtances of the perſons ſlain ſo much diverſified, as ſhow that he could have embelliſhed his military ſcenes with an abundant variety of particulars, if his genius had led him to dwell upon them. One man " is ſtretched in the " duſt of his native land ; he fell, where often he had ſpread the " feaſt, and often raiſed the voice of the harp †." The maid of Iniſtore is introduced, in a moving apoſtrophe, as weeping for another ‡; and a third, " as rolled in the duſt he lifted his " faint eyes to the king," is remembered and mourned by Fingal as the friend of Agandecca ‖. The blood pouring from the wound of one who is ſlain by night, is heard " hiſſing on the half extinguiſhed " oak," which had been kindled for giving light : Another, climbing a tree to eſcape from his foe, is pierced by his ſpear from behind ; " ſhrieking, panting he fell ; whilſt moſs and withered branches " purſue his fall, and ſtrew the blue arms of Gaul §." Never was a finer picture drawn of the ardour of two youthful warriors than the following : " I ſaw Gaul in his armour, and my ſoul " was mixed with his: For the fire of the battle was in his eyes ; " he looked to the foe with joy. We ſpoke the words of friend- " ſhip in ſecret ; and the lightening of our ſwords poured together. " We drew them behind the wood, and tried the ſtrength of our " arms on the empty air ¶."

Oſſian is always conciſe in his deſcriptions, which adds much to their beauty and force. For it is a great miſtake to imagine, that a crowd of particulars, or a very full and extended ſtyle, is of advantage to deſcription. On the contrary, ſuch a diffuſe manner for the moſt part weakens it. Any one redundant circumſtance is a nuiſance. It encumbers and loads the fancy, and renders the main image indiſtinct. " Obſtat," as Quintilian ſays with regard to ſtyle, " quicquid non adjuvat." To be conciſe in deſcription, is one thing ; and to be general, is another. No deſcription that reſts in generals can poſſibly be good ; it can convey no lively idea ; for it is of particulars only that we have a diſtinct conception. But at the ſame time, no ſtrong imagination dwells long upon any one particular ; or heaps together a maſs of trivial ones. By the happy choice of ſome one, or of a few that are the moſt ſtriking, it pre-

† P. 28. ‡ P 14. ‖ P. 59. § P. 236. ¶ P. 232.

ſents

ſents the image more compleat, ſhows us more at one glance, than a feeble imagination is able to do, by turning its object round and round into a variety of lights. Tacitus is of all proſe writers the moſt conciſe. He has even a degree of abruptneſs reſembling our author: Yet no writer is more eminent for lively deſcription. When Fingal, after having conquered the haughty Swaran, propoſes to diſmiſs him with honour: "Raiſe to-morrow thy white ſails to "the wind, thou brother of Agandecca!" † he conveys, by thus addreſſing his enemy, a ſtronger impreſſion of the emotions then paſſing within his mind, than if whole paragraphs had been ſpent in deſcribing the conflict between reſentment againſt Swaran and the tender remembrance of his ancient love. No amplification is needed to give us the moſt full idea of a hardy veteran, after the few following words: "His ſhield is marked with the ſtrokes of "battle; his red eye deſpiſes danger ‡." When Oſcar, left alone, was ſurrounded by foes, "he ſtood," it is ſaid, "growing in his "place, like the flood of the narrow vale ‖;" a happy repreſentation of one, who, by daring intrepidity in the midſt of danger, ſeems to increaſe in his appearance, and becomes more formidable every moment, like the ſudden riſing of the torrent hemmed in by the valley. And a whole crowd of ideas, concerning the circumſtances of domeſtic ſorrow occaſioned by a young warrior's firſt going forth to battle, is poured upon the mind by theſe words; "Calmar "leaned on his father's ſpear; that ſpear which he brought from "Lara's hall, when the foal of his mother was ſad §."

The conciſeneſs of Oſſian's deſcriptions is the more proper on account of his ſubjects. Deſcriptions of gay and ſmiling ſcenes may, without any diſadvantage, be amplified and prolonged. Force is not the predominant quality expected in theſe. The deſcription may be weakened by being diffuſe, yet notwithſtanding, may be beautiful ſtill. Whereas, with reſpect to grand, ſolemn and pathetic ſubjects, which are Oſſian's chief field, the caſe is very different. In theſe, energy is above all things required. The imagination muſt be ſeized at once, or not at all; and is far more deeply impreſſed by one ſtrong and ardent image, than by the anxious minuteneſs of laboured illuſtration.

† P. 77. ‡ P. 174. ‖ P. 102. § P. 40.

But Oſſian's genius, though chiefly turned towards the ſublime and pathetic, was not confined to it: In ſubjects alſo of grace and delicacy, he diſcovers the hand of a maſter. Take for an example the following elegant deſcription of Agandecca, wherein the tenderneſs of Tibullus ſeems united with the majeſty of Virgil. "The daughter of the ſnow overheard, and left the hall of her "ſecret ſigh. She came in all her beauty; like the moon from "the cloud of the Eaſt. Lovelineſs was around her as light. Her "ſteps were like the muſic of ſongs. She ſaw the youth and loved "him. He was the ſtolen ſigh of her ſoul. Her blue eyes rolled "on him in ſecret: And ſhe bleſt the chief of Morven †." Several other inſtances might be produced of the feelings of love and friendſhip painted by our author with a moſt natural and happy delicacy.

The ſimplicity of Oſſian's manner adds great beauty to his deſcriptions, and indeed to his whole Poetry. We meet with no affected ornaments; no forced refinement; no marks either in ſtyle or thought of a ſtudied endeavour to ſhine and ſparkle. Oſſian appears every where to be prompted by his feelings; and to ſpeak from the abundance of his heart. I remember no more than one inſtance of what can be called quaint thought in this whole collection of his works. It is in the firſt book of Fingal, where from the tombs of two lovers two lonely yews are mentioned to have ſprung, "whoſe branches wiſhed to meet on high ‡." This ſympathy of the trees with the lovers, may be reckoned to border on an Italian conceit; and it is ſomewhat curious to find this ſingle inſtance of that ſort of wit in our Celtic poetry.

The "joy of grief," is one of Oſſian's peculiar expreſſions, ſeveral times repeated. If any one ſhall think that it needs to be juſtified by a precedent, he may find it twice uſed by Homer; in the Iliad, when Achilles is viſited by the ghoſt of Patroclus; and in the Odyſſey, when Ulyſſes meets his mother in the ſhades. On both theſe occaſions, the heroes, melted with tenderneſs, lament their not having it in their power to throw their arms round the

† P. 37. ‡ P. 18.

ghoſt,

ghoſt, " that we might," ſay they, " in a mutual embrace, enjoy " the delight of grief."

—— κρυεροῖο τεταρπώμεσθα γόοιο *.

But in truth the expreſſion ſtands in need of no defence from authority; for it is a natural and juſt expreſſion; and conveys a clear idea of that gratification, which a virtuous heart often feels in the indulgence of a tender melancholy. Oſſian makes a very proper diſtinction between this gratification, and the deſtructive effect of overpowering grief. " There is a joy in grief, when peace " dwells in the breaſts of the ſad. But ſorrow waſtes the mournful, " O daughter of Toſcar, and their days are few †." To " give " the joy of grief," generally ſignifies to raiſe the ſtrain of ſoft and grave muſick; and finely characteriſes the taſte of Oſſian's age and country. In thoſe days, when the ſongs of bards were the great delight of heroes, the tragic muſe was held in chief honour; gallant actions, and virtuous ſufferings, were the choſen theme; preferably to that light and trifling ſtrain of poetry and muſick, which promotes light and trifling manners, and ſerves to emaſculate the mind. " Strike the harp in my hall," ſaid the great Fingal, in the midſt of youth and victory. " Strike the harp in my hall, and let Fingal " hear the ſong. Pleaſant is the joy of grief! It is like the ſhower " of ſpring, when it ſoftens the branch of the oak; and the young " leaf lifts its green head. Sing on, O bards! To-morrow we lift " the ſail ‡."

Perſonal epithets have been much uſed by all the poets of the moſt ancient ages; and when well choſen, not general and unmeaning, they contribute not a little to render the ſtyle deſcriptive and animated. Beſides epithets founded on bodily diſtinctions, akin to many of Homer's, we find in Oſſian ſeveral which are remarkably beautiful and poetical. Such as, Oſcar of the future fights, Fingal of the mildeſt look, Carril of other times, the mildly bluſhing Evirallin; Bragela, the lonely ſun-beam of Dunſcaich; a Culdee, the ſon of the ſecret cell.

* Odyſſ. 11. 211. Iliad 23. 98. † P. 250. ‡ Carric-thura, p. 193.

*

But

But of all the ornaments employed in deſcriptive poetry, compariſons or ſimiles are the moſt ſplendid. Theſe chiefly form what is called the imagery of a poem: And as they abound ſo much in the works of Oſſian, and are commonly among the favourite paſſages of all poets, it may be expected that I ſhould be ſomewhat particular in my remarks upon them.

A poetical ſimile always ſuppoſes two objects brought together, between which there is ſome near relation or connection in the fancy. What that relation ought to be, cannot be preciſely defined. For various, almoſt numberleſs, are the analogies formed among objects, by a ſprightly imagination. The relation of actual ſimilitude, or likeneſs of appearance, is far from being the only foundation of poetical compariſon. Sometimes a reſemblance in the effect produced by two objects, is made the connecting principle: Sometimes a reſemblance in one diſtinguiſhing property or circumſtance. Very often two objects are brought together in a ſimile, though they reſemble one another, ſtrictly ſpeaking, in nothing, only becauſe they raiſe in the mind a train of ſimilar, and what may be called, concordant ideas; ſo that the remembrance of the one, when recalled, ſerves to quicken and heighten the impreſſion made by the other. Thus, to give an inſtance from our poet, the pleaſure with which an old man looks back on the exploits of his youth, has certainly no direct reſemblance to the beauty of a fine evening; farther than that both agree in producing a certain calm, placid joy. Yet Oſſian has founded upon this, one of the moſt beautiful compariſons that is to be met with in any poet. "Wilt thou not liſten, ſon of the rock, "to the ſong of Oſſian? My ſoul is full of other times; the joy of "my youth returns. Thus, the ſun appears in the weſt, after the "ſteps of his brightneſs have moved behind a ſtorm. The green "hills lift their dewy heads. The blue ſtreams rejoice in the vale. "The aged hero comes forth on his ſtaff; and his grey hair glitters "in the beam *." Never was there a finer group of objects. It raiſes a ſtrong conception of the old man's joy and elation of heart, by diſplaying a ſcene, which produces in every ſpectator, a correſponding train of pleaſing emotions; the declining ſun looking forth

* P. 220.

in his brightneſs after a ſtorm; the chearful face of all nature; and the ſtill life finely animated by the circumſtance of the aged hero, with his ſtaff and his grey locks; a circumſtance both extremely pictureſque in itſelf, and peculiarly ſuited to the main object of the compariſon. Such analogies and aſſociations of ideas as theſe, are highly pleaſing to the fancy. They give opportunity for introducing many a fine poetical picture. They diverſify the ſcene; they aggrandize the ſubject; they keep the imagination awake and ſprightly. For as the judgment is principally exerciſed in diſtinguiſhing objects, and remarking the differences among thoſe which ſeem like; ſo the higheſt amuſement of the imagination is to trace likeneſſes and agreements among thoſe which ſeem different.

The principal rules which reſpect poetical compariſons are, that they be introduced on proper occaſions, when the mind is diſpoſed to reliſh them; and not in the midſt of ſome ſevere and agitating paſſion, which cannot admit this play of fancy; that they be founded on a reſemblance neither too near and obvious, ſo as to give little amuſement to the imagination in tracing it, nor too faint and remote, ſo as to be apprehended with difficulty; that they ſerve either to illuſtrate the principal object, and to render the conception of it more clear and diſtinct; or at leaſt, to heighten and embelliſh it, by a ſuitable aſſociation of images *.

Every country has a ſcenery peculiar to itſelf; and the imagery of a good poet will exhibit it. For as he copies after nature, his alluſions will of courſe be taken from thoſe objects which he ſees around him, and which have oftenеſt ſtruck his fancy. For this reaſon, in order to judge of the propriety of poetical imagery, we ought to be, in ſome meaſure, acquainted with the natural hiſtory of the country where the ſcene of the poem is laid. The introduction of foreign images betrays a poet, copying not from nature, but from other writers. Hence ſo many Lions, and Tygers, and Eagles and Serpents, which we meet with in the ſimiles of modern poets; as if theſe animals had acquired ſome right to a place in poetical compariſons for ever, becauſe employed by ancient authors. They employed them with propriety, as objects generally known in their

* See Elements of Criticiſm, ch. 19. vol. 3.

country;

country; but they are abſurdly uſed for illuſtration by us, who know them only at ſecond hand, or by deſcription. To moſt readers of modern poetry, it were more to the purpoſe to deſcribe Lions or Tygers by ſimiles taken from men, than to compare men to Lions. Oſſian is very correct in this particular. His imagery is, without exception, copied from that face of nature, which he ſaw before his eyes; and by conſequence may be expected to be lively. We meet with no Grecian or Italian ſcenery; but with the miſts, and clouds, and ſtorms of a northern mountainous region.

No poet abounds more in ſimiles than Oſſian. There are in this collection as many, at leaſt, as in the whole Iliad of Homer, though that be a longer work. I am indeed inclined to think, that the works of both poets are too much crowded with them. Similes are ſparkling ornaments; and like all things that ſparkle, are apt to dazzle and tire us by their luſtre. But if Oſſian's ſimiles be too frequent, they have this advantage of being commonly ſhorter than Homer's; they interrupt his narration leſs; he juſt glances aſide to ſome reſembling object, and inſtantly returns to his former track. Homer's ſimiles include a wider range of objects. But in return, Oſſian's are, without exception, taken from objects of dignity, which cannot be ſaid for all thoſe which Homer employs. The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, Clouds and Meteors, Lightning and Thunder, Seas and Whales, Rivers, Torrents, Winds, Rain, Snow, Dews, Miſt, Fire and Smoke, Trees and Torrents, Heath and Graſs and Flowers, Rocks and Mountains, Muſick and Songs, Light and Darkneſs, Spirits and Ghoſts; theſe form the circle, within which Oſſian's compariſons generally run. Some, not many, are taken from Birds and Beaſts; as Eagles, Sea Fowl, the Horſe, the Deer, and the Mountain Bee; and a very few from ſuch operations of art as were then known. Homer has diverſified his imagery by many more alluſions to the animal world; to Lions, Bulls, Goats, Herds of Cattle, Serpents, Inſects; and to the various occupations of rural and paſtoral life. Oſſian's defect in this article, is plainly owing to the deſert, uncultivated ſtate of his country, which ſuggeſted to him few images beyond natural inanimate objects, in their rudeſt form. The birds and animals of the country were probably not numerous; and his acquaintance with them was ſlender, as they were little ſubjected to the uſes of man.

The

The great objection made to Oſſian's imagery, is its uniformity, and the too frequent repetition of the ſame compariſons. In a work ſo thick ſown with ſimiles, one could not but expect to find images of the ſame kind ſometimes ſuggeſted to the poet by reſembling objects; eſpecially to a poet like Oſſian, who wrote from the immediate impulſe of poetical enthuſiaſm, and without much preparation of ſtudy or labour. Fertile as Homer's imagination is acknowledged to be, who does not know how often his Lions and Bulls and Flocks of Sheep, recur with little or no variation; nay, ſometimes in the very ſame words? The objection made to Oſſian is, however, founded, in a great meaſure, upon a miſtake. It has been ſuppoſed by inattentive readers, that wherever the Moon, the Cloud, or the Thunder, returns in a ſimile, it is the ſame ſimile, and the ſame Moon, or Cloud, or Thunder, which they had met with a few pages before. Whereas very often the ſimiles are widely different. The object, whence they are taken, is indeed in ſubſtance the ſame; but the image is new; for the appearance of the object is changed; it is preſented to the fancy in another attitude; and cloathed with new circumſtances, to make it ſuit the different illuſtration for which it is employed. In this, lies Oſſian's great art; in ſo happily varying the form of the few natural appearances with which he was acquainted, as to make them correſpond to a great many different objects.

Let us take for one inſtance the Moon, which is very frequently introduced into his compariſons; as in northern climates, where the nights are long, the Moon is a greater object of attention, than in the climate of Homer; and let us view how much our poet has diverſified its appearance. The ſhield of a warrior is like "the darkened "moon when it moves a dun circle through the heavens *." The face of a ghoſt, wan and pale, is like "the beam of the ſetting "moon †." And a different appearance of a ghoſt, thin and indiſtinct, is like "the new moon ſeen through the gathered miſt, "when the ſky pours down its flaky ſnow, and the world is ſilent "and dark ‡;" or in a different form ſtill, it is like "the watry beam "of the moon, when it ruſhes from between two clouds, and the

* P. 29. † P. 22. ‡ P. 131.

"midnight

" midnight ſhower is on the field *." A very oppoſite uſe is made of the moon in the deſcription of Agandecca: " She came in all her " beauty, like the moon from the cloud of the Eaſt †." Hope, ſucceeded by diſappointment, is " joy riſing on her face, and ſorrow " returning again, like a thin cloud on the moon ‡." But when Swaran, after his defeat, is cheared by Fingal's generoſity, " His face " brightened like the full moon of heaven, when the clouds vaniſh " away, and leave her calm and broad in the midſt of the ſky ‖." Venvela is " bright as the moon when it trembles o'er the weſtern " wave §;" but the ſoul of the guilty Uthal is " dark as the trou- " bled face of the moon, when it foretels the ſtorm ¶." And by a very fanciful and uncommon alluſion, it is ſaid of Cormac, who was to die in his early years, " Nor long ſhalt thou lift the ſpear, " mildly ſhining beam of youth! Death ſtands dim behind thee, " like the darkened half of the moon behind its growing light **."

Another inſtance of the ſame nature may be taken from miſt, which, as being a very familiar appearance in the country of Oſſian, he applies to a variety of purpoſes, and purſues through a great many forms. Sometimes, which one would hardly expect, he employs it to heighten the appearance of a beautiful object. The hair of Morna is " like the miſt of Cromla, when it curls on the rock, " and ſhines to the beam of the weſt ††."—"The ſong comes with its " muſick to melt and pleaſe the ear. It is like ſoft miſt, that riſing " from a lake, pours on the ſilent vale. The green flowers are " filled with dew. The ſun returns in its ſtrength, and the miſt is " gone ‡‡."—But, for the moſt part, miſt is employed as a ſimili-

* P. 119.
† P. 37.
‡ P. 119.
‖ P. 79.
§ P. 195.
¶ P. 264.
** P. 146.
†† P. 8.
‡‡ P. 215. There is a remarkable propriety in this compariſon. It is intended to explain the effect of ſoft and mournful muſick. Armin appears diſturbed at a performance of this kind. Carmor ſays to him, " Why burſts the " ſigh of Armin? Is there a cauſe to " mourn? The ſong comes with its " muſick to melt and pleaſe the ear. It " is like ſoft miſt, &c." that is, ſuch mournful ſongs have a happy effect to ſoften the heart, and to improve it by tender emotions, as the moiſture of the miſt refreſhes and nouriſhes the flowers; whilſt the ſadneſs they occaſion is only tranſient, and ſoon diſpelled by the ſucceeding occupations and amuſements of life: " The ſun returns in its ſtrength, " and the miſt is gone."

tude:

tude of ſome diſagreeable or terrible object. " The ſoul of Nathos " was ſad, like the ſun in the day of miſt, when his face is watery " and dim *." " The darkneſs of old age comes like the miſt of " the deſert †." The face of a ghoſt is " pale as the miſt of " Cromla ‡." " The gloom of battle is rolled along as miſt that " is poured on the valley, when ſtorms invade the ſilent ſun-ſhine " of heaven ‖." Fame, ſuddenly departing, is likened to " miſt " that flies away before the ruſtling wind of the vale §." A ghoſt, ſlowly vaniſhing, to " miſt that melts by degrees on the ſunny " hill ¶." But of all the ſimiles founded on miſt, the moſt highly finiſhed, is that wherein Cairbar, after his treacherous aſſaſſination of Oſcar, is compared to a peſtilential fog. " I love a foe like Cath- " mor," ſays Fingal, " his ſoul is great; his arm is ſtrong; his " battles are full of fame. But the little ſoul is like a vapour that " hovers round the marſhy lake. It never riſes on the green hill, " leſt the winds meet it there. Its dwelling is in the cave; and it " ſends forth the dart of death **." Theſe inſtances may ſufficiently ſhew with what richneſs of imagination Oſſian's compariſons abound, and at the ſame time, with what propriety of judgment they are employed. If his field was narrow, it muſt be admitted to have been as well cultivated as its extent would allow.

As it is uſual to judge of poets from a compariſon of their ſimiles more than of other paſſages, it will perhaps be agreeable to the reader, to ſee how Homer and Oſſian have conducted ſome images of the ſame kind. This might be ſhewn in many inſtances. For as the great objects of nature are common to the poets of all nations, and make the general ſtore-houſe of all imagery, the ground-work of their compariſons muſt of courſe be frequently the ſame. I ſhall ſelect only a few of the moſt conſiderable from both poets. Mr. Pope's tranſlation of Homer can be of no uſe to us here. The parallel is altogether unfair between proſe, and the impoſing harmony of flowing numbers. It is only by viewing Homer in the ſimplicity of a proſe tranſlation, that we can form any compariſon between the two bards.

* P. 159. † P. 162. ‡ P. 52. ‖ P. 27.
§ P. 79. ¶ P. 101. ** P. 189.

The

The ſhock of two encountering armies, the noiſe and the tumult of battle, afford one of the moſt grand and awful ſubjects of deſcription; on which all Epic poets have exerted their ſtrength. Let us firſt hear Homer. The following deſcription is a favourite one, for we find it twice repeated in the ſame words *. "When now "the conflicting hoſts joined in the field of battle, then were mu- "tually oppoſed ſhields, and ſwords, and the ſtrength of armed "men. The boſſy bucklers were daſhed againſt each other. The "univerſal tumult roſe. There were mingled the triumphant ſhouts "and the dying groans of the victors and the vanquiſhed. The "earth ſtreamed with blood. As when winter torrents, ruſhing "from the mountains, pour into a narrow valley, their violent wa- "ters. They iſſue from a thouſand ſprings, and mix in the "hollowed channel. The diſtant ſhepherd hears on the mountain, "their roar from afar. Such was the terror and the ſhout of the "engaging armies." In another paſſage, the poet, much in the manner of Oſſian, heaps ſimile on ſimile, to expreſs the vaſtneſs of the idea, with which his imagination ſeems to labour. "With a "mighty ſhout the hoſts engage. Not ſo loud roars the wave of "ocean, when driven againſt the ſhore by the whole force of the "boiſterous north; not ſo loud in the woods of the mountain, the "noiſe of the flame, when riſing in its fury to conſume the foreſt; "not ſo loud the wind among the lofty oaks, when the wrath of "the ſtorm rages; as was the clamour of the Greeks and Tro- "jans, when, roaring terrible, they ruſhed againſt each other †."

To theſe deſcriptions and ſimiles, we may oppoſe the following from Oſſian, and leave the reader to judge between them. He will find images of the ſame kind employed; commonly leſs extended; but thrown forth with a glowing rapidity which characteriſes our poet. "As autumn's dark ſtorms pour from two echoing hills, "towards each other, approached the heroes. As two dark "ſtreams from high rocks meet, and mix, and roar on the plain; "loud, rough, and dark in battle, meet Lochlin and Inisfail. "Chief mixed his ſtrokes with chief, and man with man. Steel "clanging, ſounded on ſteel. Helmets are cleft on high; blood

* Iliad iv. 446, and II. viii. 60.

† Iliad xiv. 393.

" burſts and ſmoaks around.—As the troubled noiſe of the ocean, " when roll the waves on high; as the laſt peal of the thunder of " heaven, ſuch is the noiſe of battle *.—As roll a thouſand waves " to the rock, ſo Swaran's hoſt came on; as meets a rock a thou- " ſand waves, ſo Inisfail met Swaran. Death raiſes all his voices " around, and mixes with the ſound of ſhields.—The field echoes " from wing to wing, as a hundred hammers that riſe by turns on " the red ſon of the furnace †.——As a hundred winds on Mor- " ven; as the ſtreams of a hundred hills; as clouds fly ſucceſſive " over heaven; or as the dark ocean aſſaults the ſhore of the de- " ſart; ſo roaring, ſo vaſt, ſo terrible, the armies mixed on Lena's " echoing heath ‡." In ſeveral of theſe images, there is a remark- able ſimilarity to Homer's; but what follows is ſuperior to any compariſon that Homer uſes on this ſubject. " The groan of the " people ſpread over the hills; it was like the thunder of night, " when the cloud burſts on Cona; and a thouſand ghoſts ſhriek at " once on the hollow wind §." Never was an image of more awful ſublimity employed to heighten the terror of battle.

Both poets compare the appearance of an army approaching, to the gathering of dark clouds. " As when a ſhepherd," ſays Homer, " beholds from the rock, a cloud borne along the ſea by the " weſtern wind; black as pitch it appears from afar, ſailing over " the ocean, and carrying the dreadful ſtorm. He ſhrinks at the " ſight, and drives his flock into the cave: Such, under the Ajaces, " moved on, the dark, the thickened phalanx to the war ‖." —" They came," ſays Oſſian, " over the deſert like ſtormy " clouds, when the winds roll them over the heath; their edges " are tinged with lightening; and the echoing groves foreſee the " ſtorm ¶." The edges of the cloud tinged with lightning, is a ſublime idea; but the ſhepherd and his flock, render Homer's ſimile more pictureſque. This is frequently the difference between the two poets. Oſſian gives no more than the main image, ſtrong and full. Homer adds circumſtances and appendages, which amuſe the fancy by enlivening the ſcenery.

* P. 12. † P. 14. ‡ P. 43. § Ibid.
‖ Iliad iv. 275. ¶ P. 109.

Homer

Homer compares the regular appearance of an army, to "clouds "that are ſettled on the mountain top, in the day of calmneſs, "when the ſtrength of the north wind ſleeps *." Oſſian, with full as much propriety, compares the appearance of a diſordered army, to "the mountain cloud, when the blaſt hath entered its womb; "and ſcatters the curling gloom on every ſide †. Oſſian's clouds aſſume a great many forms; and, as we might expect from his climate, are a fertile ſource of imagery to him. "The warriors followed their chiefs, like the gathering of the rainy clouds, behind "the red meteors of heaven ‡." An army retreating without coming to action, is likened to "clouds, that having long "threatened rain, retire ſlowly behind the hills §." The picture of Oithona, after ſhe had determined to die, is lively and delicate. "Her ſoul was reſolved, and the tear was dried from her wildly-"looking eye. A troubled joy roſe on her mind, like the red path "of the lightning on a ſtormy cloud ‖." The image alſo of the gloomy Cairbar, meditating, in ſilence, the aſſaſſination of Oſcar, until the moment came when his deſigns were ripe for execution, is extremely noble, and complete in all its parts. "Cairbar heard "their words in ſilence, like the cloud of a ſhower; it ſtands dark "on Cromla, till the lightning burſts its ſide. The valley gleams "with red light; the ſpirits of the ſtorm rejoice. So ſtood the "ſilent king of Temora; at length his words are heard ¶."

Homer's compariſon of Achilles to the Dog-Star, is very ſublime. "Priam beheld him ruſhing along the plain, ſhining in his armour, "like the ſtar of autumn; bright are its beams, diſtinguiſhed "amidſt the multitude of ſtars in the dark hour of night. It riſes "in its ſplendor; but its ſplendor is fatal; betokening to miſerable "men, the deſtroying heat **." The firſt appearance of Fingal, is, in like manner, compared by Oſſian, to a ſtar or meteor. "Fingal, tall in his ſhip, ſtretched his bright lance before him. "Terrible was the gleam of his ſteel; it was like the green meteor "of death, ſetting in the heath of Malmor, when the traveller is alone,

* Iliad, v. 522. † P. 224. ‡ P. 4. § P. 165.
‖ P. 246. ¶ P. 176. ** Iliad, xxii. 26.

" and the broad moon is darkened in heaven *." The hero's appearance in Homer, is more magnificent; in Oſſian, more terrible.

A tree cut down, or overthrown by a ſtorm, is a ſimilitude frequent among poets for deſcribing the fall of a warrior in battle. Homer employs it often. But the moſt beautiful, by far, of his compariſons, founded on this object, indeed one of the moſt beautiful in the whole Iliad, is that on the death of Euphorbus. " As " the young and verdant olive, which a man hath reared with care " in a lonely field, where the ſprings of water bubble around it; it " is fair and flouriſhing; it is fanned by the breath of all the " winds, and loaded with white bloſſoms; when the ſudden blaſt " of a whirlwind deſcending, roots it out from its bed, and ſtretches " it on the duſt †." To this, elegant as it is, we may oppoſe the following ſimile of Oſſian's, relating to the death of the three ſons of Uſnoth. " They fell, like three young oaks which ſtood alone " on the hill. The traveller ſaw the lovely trees, and wondered " how they grew ſo lonely. The blaſt of the deſert came by night, " and laid their green heads low. Next day he returned; but they " were withered, and the heath was bare ‡." Malvina's alluſion to the ſame object, in her lamentation over Oſcar, is ſo exquiſitely tender, that I cannot forbear giving it a place alſo. " I was a " lovely tree in thy preſence, Oſcar! with all my branches round " me. But thy death came, like a blaſt from the deſert, and laid " my green head low. The ſpring returned with its ſhowers; but " no leaf of mine aroſe ‖." Several of Oſſian's ſimiles taken from trees, are remarkably beautiful, and diverſified with well choſen circumſtances; ſuch as that upon the death of Ryno and Orla: " They have fallen like the oak of the deſert; when it lies acroſs a " ſtream, and withers in the wind of the mountains §:" Or that which Oſſian applies to himſelf; " I, like an ancient oak in Morven, moul- " der alone in my place; the blaſt hath lopped my branches away; " and I tremble at the wings of the north ¶."

As Homer exalts his heroes by comparing them to gods, Oſſian makes the ſame uſe of compariſons taken from ſpirits and ghoſts.

* P. 41. † Iliad xvii. 53. ‡ P. 170. ‖ P. 250.
§ P. 70. ¶ P. 191.

Swaran

Swaran " roared in battle, like the ſhrill ſpirit of a ſtorm that ſits " dim on the clouds of Gormal, and enjoys the death of the ma- " riner *." His people gathered around Erragon, " like ſtorms " around the ghoſt of night, when he calls them from the top of " Morven, and prepares to pour them on the land of the ſtran- " ger †."——" They fell before my ſon, like groves in the deſert, " when an angry ghoſt ruſhes through night, and takes their green " heads in his hand ‡." In ſuch images, Oſſian appears in his ſtrength; for very ſeldom have ſupernatural beings been painted with ſo much ſublimity, and ſuch force of imagination, as by this poet. Even Homer, great as he is, muſt yield to him in ſimiles formed upon theſe. Take, for inſtance, the following, which is the moſt remarkable of this kind in the Iliad. " Meriones followed " Idomeneus to battle, like Mars the deſtroyer of men, when he " ruſhes to war. Terror, his beloved ſon, ſtrong and fierce, at- " tends him; who fills with diſmay, the moſt valiant hero. They " come from Thrace, armed againſt the Ephyrians and Phlegyans; " nor do they regard the prayers of either; but diſpoſe of ſucceſs at " their will §." The idea here, is undoubtedly noble: But obſerve what a figure Oſſian ſets before the aſtoniſhed imagination, and with what ſublimely terrible circumſtances he has heightened it. " He " ruſhed in the ſound of his arms, like the dreadful ſpirit of Loda, " when he comes in the roar of a thouſand ſtorms, and ſcatters " battles from his eyes. He ſits on a cloud over Lochlin's ſeas. " His mighty hand is on his ſword. The winds lift his flaming " locks. So terrible was Cuchullin in the day of his fame ‖."

Homer's compariſons relate chiefly to martial ſubjects, to the appearances and motions of armies, the engagement and death of heroes, and the various incidents of war. In Oſſian, we find a greater variety of other ſubjects illuſtrated by ſimiles; particularly, the ſongs of bards, the beauty of women, the different circumſtances of old age, ſorrow, and private diſtreſs; which give occaſion to much beautiful imagery. What, for inſtance, can be more delicate and moving, than the following ſimile of Oithona's, in her lamentation over the diſhonour ſhe had ſuffered? " Chief of

* P. 13. † P. 114. ‡ P. 180.
§ Iliad xiii. 298. ‖ P. 151.

" Strumon,

" Strumon, replied the ſighing maid, why didſt thou come over " the dark blue wave to Nuath's mournful daughter? Why did not " I paſs away in ſecret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its " fair head unſeen, and ſtrews its withered leaves on the blaſt *?" The muſick of bards, a favourite object with Oſſian, is illuſtrated by a variety of the moſt beautiful appearances that are to be found in nature. It is compared to the calm ſhower of ſpring; to the dews of the morning on the hill of roes; to the face of the blue and ſtill lake †. Two ſimiles on this ſubject, I ſhall quote, becauſe they would do honour to any of the moſt celebrated claſſics. The one is; " Sit thou on the heath, O bard! and let us hear thy voice; " it is pleaſant as the gale of the ſpring that ſighs on the hunter's " ear, when he wakens from dreams of joy, and has heard the " muſic of the ſpirits of the hill ‡." The other contains a ſhort, but exquiſitely tender image, accompanied with the fineſt poetical painting. " The muſic of Carryl was like the memory of joys " that are paſt, pleaſant and mournful to the ſoul. The ghoſts of " departed bards heard it from Slimora's ſide. Soft ſounds ſpread " along the wood; and the ſilent valleys of night rejoice §." What a figure would ſuch imagery and ſuch ſcenery have made, had they been preſented to us, adorned with the ſweetneſs and harmony of the Virgilian numbers!

I have choſen all along to compare Oſſian with Homer, rather than Virgil, for an obvious reaſon. There is a much nearer correſpondence between the times and manners of the two former poets. Both wrote in an early period of ſociety; both are originals; both are diſtinguiſhed by ſimplicity, ſublimity, and fire. The correct elegance of Virgil, his artful imitation of Homer, the Roman ſtateline ſs which he every where maintains, admit no parallel with the abrupt boldneſs, and enthuſiaſtick warmth of the Celtic bard. In one article, indeed, there is a reſemblance. Virgil is more tender than Homer; and thereby agrees more with Oſſian; with this difference, that the feelings of the one are more gentle and poliſhed, thoſe of the other, more ſtrong; the tenderneſs of Virgil ſoftens, that of Oſſian diſſolves and overcomes the heart.

* P. 244. † Vid. p. 215, 18, 35, 194. ‡ P. 72.
§ P. 147.

A re-

A reſemblance may be ſometimes obſerved between Oſſian's compariſons, and thoſe employed by the ſacred writers. They abound much in this figure, and they uſe it with the utmoſt propriety *. The imagery of Scripture exhibits a ſoil and climate altogether different from thoſe of Oſſian; a warmer country, a more ſmiling face of nature, the arts of agriculture and of rural life much farther advanced. The wine preſs, and the threſhing floor, are often preſented to us, the Cedar and the Palm-tree, the fragrance of perfumes, the voice of the Turtle, and the beds of Lillies. The ſimiles are, like Oſſian's, generally ſhort, touching on one point of reſemblance, rather than ſpread out into little epiſodes. In the following example, may be perceived what inexpreſſible grandeur poetry receives from the intervention of the Deity. "The nations "ſhall ruſh like the ruſhings of many waters; but God ſhall re- "buke them, and they ſhall fly far off, and ſhall be chaſed as "the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the down of "the thiſtle before the whirlwind †."

Beſides formal compariſons, the poetry of Oſſian is embelliſhed with many beautiful metaphors: Such as that remarkably fine one applied to Deugala; "She was covered with the light of beauty; "but her heart was the houſe of pride ‡." This mode of expreſſion, which ſuppreſſes the mark of compariſon, and ſubſtitutes a figured deſcription in room of the object deſcribed, is a great enlivener of ſtyle. It denotes that glow and rapidity of fancy, which without pauſing to form a regular ſimile, paints the object at one ſtroke. "Thou art to me the beam of the eaſt, riſing in a land "unknown §."—"In peace, thou art the gale of ſpring; in war, "the mountain ſtorm ‖."——"Pleaſant be thy reſt, O lovely beam, "ſoon haſt thou ſet on our hills! The ſteps of thy departure were "ſtately, like the moon on the blue trembling wave. But thou "haſt left us in darkneſs, firſt of the maids of Lutha!—Soon haſt "thou ſet Malvina! but thou riſeſt, like the beam of the eaſt, "among the ſpirits of thy friends, where they ſit in their ſtormy "halls, the chambers of the thunder ¶." This is correct and finely ſupported. But in the following inſtance, the metaphor,

* See Dr. Lowth de Sacra Poeſi Hebræorum. † Iſaiah xvii. 13.
‡ P. 31. § P. 244. ‖ P. 78. ¶ P. 259.

though

though very beautiful at the beginning, becomes imperfect before it closes, by being improperly mixed with the literal sense. "Trothal "went forth with the stream of his people; but they met a rock; "Fingal stood unmoved; broken they rolled back from his side. "Nor did they roll in safety; the spear of the king pursued their "flight *."

The hyperbole is a figure which we might expect to find often employed by Ossian; as the undisciplined imagination of early ages generally prompts exaggeration, and carries its objects to excess; whereas longer experience, and farther progress in the arts of life, chasten mens ideas and expressions. Yet Ossian's hyperboles appear not to me, either so frequent or so harsh as might at first have been looked for; an advantage owing no doubt to the more cultivated state, in which, as was before shewn, poetry subsisted among the ancient Celtæ, than among most other barbarous nations. One of the most exaggerated descriptions in the whole work, is what meets us at the beginning of Fingal, where the scout makes his report to Cuchullin of the landing of the foe. But this is so far from deserving censure, that it merits praise, as being, on that occasion, natural and proper. The scout arrives, trembling and full of fears; and it is well known, that no passion dispose men to hyperbolize more than terror. It both annihilates themselves in their own apprehension, and magnifies every object which they view through the medium of a troubled imagination. Hence all those indistinct images of formidable greatness, the natural marks of a disturbed and confused mind, which occur in Moran's description of Swaran's appearance, and in his relation of the conference which they held together; not unlike the report, which the affrighted Jewish spies made to their leader of the land of Canaan. "The land through which we have gone to "search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and "all the people that we saw in it, are men of a great stature: and "there saw we giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; "and we were in our own sight as grashoppers, and so were we "in their sight †."

* P. 202. † Numbers xiii. 32, 33.

With

With regard to perſonifications, I formerly obſerved that Oſſian was ſparing, and I accounted for his being ſo. Allegorical perſonages he has none; and their abſence is not to be regretted. For the intermixture of thoſe ſhadowy Beings, which have not the ſupport even of mythological or legendary belief, with human actors, ſeldom produces a good effect. The fiction becomes too viſible and phantaſtick; and overthrows that impreſſion of reality, which the probable recital of human actions is calculated to make upon the mind. In the ſerious and pathetick ſcenes of Oſſian eſpecially, allegorical characters would have been as much out of place, as in Tragedy; ſerving only unſeaſonably to amuſe the fancy, whilſt they ſtopped the current, and weakened the force of paſſion.

With apoſtrophes, or addreſſes to perſons abſent or dead, which have been, in all ages, the language of paſſion, our poet abounds; and they are among his higheſt beauties. Witneſs the apoſtrophe, in the firſt book of Fingal, to the maid of Iniſtore, whoſe lover had fallen in battle; and that inimitably fine one of Cuchullin to Bragela at the concluſion of the ſame book. He commands the harp to be ſtruck in her praiſe; and the mention of Bragela's name, immediately ſuggeſting to him a crowd of tender ideas; "Doſt thou "raiſe thy fair face from the rocks," he exclaims, "to find the "ſails of Cuchullin? The ſea is rolling far diſtant, and its white "foam ſhall deceive thee for my ſails." And now his imagination being wrought up to conceive her as, at that moment, really in this ſituation, he becomes afraid of the harm ſhe may receive from the inclemency of the night; and with an enthuſiaſm, happy and affecting, though beyond the cautious ſtrain of modern poetry, 'Re-"tire," he proceeds, "retire, for it is night, my love, and the "dark winds ſigh in thy hair. Retire to the hall of my feaſts, and "think of the times that are paſt; for I will not return till the ſtorm "of war has ceaſed. O Connal, ſpeak of wars and arms, and ſend "her from my mind; for lovely with her raven hair is the white-"boſomed daughter of Sorglan *." This breathes all the native ſpirit of paſſion and tenderneſs.

The addreſſes to the ſun †, to the moon ‡, and to the evening ſtar §, muſt draw the attention of every reader of taſte, as an ong

* P. 18. † P. 141. ‡ P. 155. § P. 209.

the moſt ſplendid ornaments of this collection. The beauties of each are too great, and too obvious to need any particular comment. In one paſſage only of the addreſs to the moon, there appears ſome obſcurity. "Whither doſt thou retire from thy courſe, when the "darkneſs of thy countenance grows? Haſt thou thy hall like "Offian? Dwelleſt thou in the ſhadow of grief? Have thy ſiſters "fallen from heaven? Are they who rejoiced with thee at night, "no more? Yes, they have fallen, fair light! and thou doſt often "retire to mourn." We may be at a loſs to comprehend, at firſt view, the ground of theſe ſpeculations of Oſſian, concerning the moon; but when all the circumſtances are attended to, they will appear to flow naturally from the preſent ſituation of his mind. A mind under the dominion of any ſtrong paſſion, tinctures with its own diſpoſition, every object which it beholds. The old bard, with his heart bleeding for the loſs of all his friends, is meditating on the different phaſes of the moon. Her waning and darkneſs, preſents to his melancholy imagination, the image of ſorrow; and preſently the idea ariſes, and is indulged, that, like himſelf, ſhe retires to mourn over the loſs of other moons, or of ſtars, whom he calls her ſiſters, and fancies to have once rejoiced with her at night, now fallen from heaven. Darkneſs ſuggeſted the idea of mourning; and mourning ſuggeſted nothing ſo naturally to Oſſian, as the death of beloved friends. An inſtance preciſely ſimilar of this influence of paſſion, may be ſeen in a paſſage which has always been admired of Shakeſpear's King Lear. The old man on the point of diſtraction, through the inhumanity of his daughters, ſees Edgar appear diſguiſed like a beggar and a madman.

Lear. Didſt thou give all to thy daughters? And art thou come to this?
Couldſt thou leave nothing? Didſt thou give them all?

Kent. He hath no daughters, Sir.

Lear. Death, traitor! nothing could have ſubdued nature,
To ſuch a lowneſs, but his unkind daughters.

King Lear, Act 3. Scene 5.

The

The apoſtrophe to the winds, in the opening of Darthula, is in the higheſt ſpirit of poetry. " But the winds deceive thee, O " Darthula! and deny the woody Etha to thy ſails. Theſe are " not thy mountains, Nathos, nor is that the roar of thy climbing " waves. The halls of Cairbar are near, and the towers of the " foe lift their head.—Where have ye been, ye ſouthern winds; " when the ſons of my love were deceived? But ye have been " ſporting on plains, and purſuing the thiſtle's beard. O that ye " had been ruſtling in the ſails of Nathos, till the hills of Etha " roſe! till they roſe in their clouds, and ſaw their coming " chief *!" This paſſage is remarkable for the reſemblance it bears to an expoſtulation with the wood nymphs, on their abſence at a critical time; which, as a favourite poetical idea, Virgil has copied from Theocritus, and Milton has very happily imitated from both.

> Where were ye, nymphs! when the remorſeleſs deep
> Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
> For neither were ye playing on the ſteep
> Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie;
> Nor on the ſhaggy top of Mona high,
> Nor yet where Deva ſpreads her wizard ſtream †.

Having now treated fully of Oſſian's talents, with reſpect to deſcription and imagery, it only remains to make ſome obſervations on his ſentiments. No ſentiments can be beautiful without being proper; that is, ſuited to the character and ſituation of thoſe who utter them. In this reſpect, Oſſian is as correct as moſt writers. His characters, as above obſerved, are in general well ſupported; which could not have been the caſe, had the ſentiments been unnatural or out of place. A variety of perſonages of different ages, ſexes, and conditions, are introduced into his poems; and they ſpeak and act with a propriety of ſentiment and behaviour, which it is ſurpriſing to find in ſo rude an age. Let the poem of Darthula, throughout, be taken as an example.

* P. 157.

† Milton's Lycidas.

See Theocrit. Idyll. I.
Πᾶ ποτ' ἄρ' ἦσθ' ὄφρα Δάφνις ἐτάκετο; ποτὰ πάκα, Νύμφαι, &c.

And Virg. Eclog. 10.
Quæ nemora, aut qui vos ſaltus habuere, puellæ, &c.

But it is not enough that ſentiments be natural and proper. In order to acquire any high degree of poetical merit, they muſt alſo be ſublime and pathetick.

The ſublime is not confined to ſentiment alone. It belongs to deſcription alſo; and whether in deſcription or in ſentiment, imports ſuch ideas preſented to the mind, as raiſe it to an uncommon degree of elevation, and fill it with admiration and aſtoniſhment. This is the higheſt effect either of eloquence or poetry: And to produce this effect, requires a genius glowing with the ſtrongeſt and warmeſt conception of ſome object awful, great or magnificent. That this character of genius belongs to Oſſian, may, I think, ſufficiently appear from many of the paſſages I have already had occaſion to quote. To produce more inſtances, were ſuperfluous. If the engagement of Fingal with the ſpirit of Loda, in Carric-thura; if the encounters of the armies, in Fingal; if the addreſs to the ſun, in Carthon; if the ſimiles founded upon ghoſts and ſpirits of the night, all formerly mentioned, be not admitted as examples, and illuſtrious ones too, of the true poetical ſublime, I confeſs myſelf entirely ignorant of this quality in writing.

All the circumſtances, indeed, of Oſſian's compoſition, are favourable to the ſublime, more perhaps than to any other ſpecies of beauty. Accuracy and correctneſs; artfully connected narration; exact method and proportion of parts, we may look for in poliſhed times. The gay and the beautiful, will appear to more advantage in the midſt of ſmiling ſcenery and pleaſurable themes. But amidſt the rude ſcenes of nature, amidſt rocks and torrents and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the ſublime. It is the thunder and the lightning of genius. It is the offſpring of nature, not of art. It is negligent of all the leſſer graces, and perfectly conſiſtent with a certain noble diſorder. It aſſociates naturally with that grave and ſolemn ſpirit, which diſtinguiſhes our author. For the ſublime, is an awful and ſerious emotion; and is heightened by all the images of Trouble, and Terror, and Darkneſs.

> Ipſe pater, media nimborum in nocte, coruſcâ
> Fulmina molitur dextrâ; quo maxima motu
>
> Terra

Terra tremit; fugere feræ; & mortalia corda
Per gentes, humilis ſtravit pavor; ille, flagranti
Aut Atho, aut Rhodopen, aut alta Ceraunia telo
Dejicit.—— VIRG. Georg. I.

Simplicity and conciſeneſs, are never-failing characteriſtics of the ſtile of a ſublime writer. He reſts on the majeſty of his ſentiments, not on the pomp of his expreſſions. The main ſecret of being ſublime, is to ſay great things in few, and in plain words: For every ſuperfluous decoration degrades a ſublime idea. The mind riſes and ſwells, when a lofty deſcription or ſentiment is preſented to it, in its native form. But no ſooner does the poet attempt to ſpread out this ſentiment or deſcription, and to deck it round and round with glittering ornaments, than the mind begins to fall from its high elevation; the tranſport is over; the beautiful may remain, but the ſublime is gone. Hence the conciſe and ſimple ſtyle of Oſſian, gives great advantage to his ſublime conceptions; and aſſiſts them in ſeizing the imagination with full power *.

Sublimity as belonging to ſentiment, coincides in a great meaſure with magnanimity, heroiſm, and generoſity of ſentiment. Whatever diſcovers human nature in its greateſt elevation; whatever beſpeaks a high effort of ſoul; or ſhews a mind ſuperior to pleaſures,

* The noted ſaying of Julius Cæſar, to the pilot in a ſtorm; "Quid times? "Cæſarem vehis;" is magnanimous and ſublime. Lucan, not ſatisfied with this ſimple conciſeneſs, reſolved to amplify and improve the thought. Obſerve, how every time he twiſts it round, it departs farther from the ſublime, till at laſt, it end in tumid declamation.

Sperne minas, inquit, Pelagi, ventoque furenti
Trade ſinum. Italiam, ſi cælo auctore, recuſas,
Me, pete. Sola tibi cauſa hæc eſt juſta timoris
Vectorem non noſſe tuum; quem numina nunquam
Deſtituunt; de quo male tunc fortuna meretur,
Cum poſt vota venit; medias perrumpe procellas
Tutelâ ſecure meâ. Cœli iſte fretique,
Non puppis noſtræ, labor eſt. Hanc Cæſare preſſam
A fluctu defendit onus.
——Quid tantâ ſtrage paratur,
Ignoras? Quærit pelagi cælique tumultu
Quid præſtet fortuna mihi.——
PHARSAL. V. 578.

to

to dangers, and to death, forms what may be called the moral or ſentimental ſublime. For this, Oſſian is eminently diſtinguiſhed. No poet maintains a higher tone of virtuous and noble ſentiment, throughout all his works. Particularly in all the ſentiments of Fingal, there is a grandeur and loftineſs proper to ſwell the mind with the higheſt ideas of human perfection. Wherever he appears, we behold the hero. The objects which he purſues, are always truly great; to bend the proud; to protect the injured; to defend his friends; to overcome his enemies by generoſity more than by force. A portion of the ſame ſpirit actuates all the other heroes. Valour reigns; but it is a generous valour, void of cruelty, animated by honour, not by hatred. We behold no debaſing paſſions among Fingal's warriors; no ſpirit of avarice or of inſult; but a perpetual contention for fame; a deſire of being diſtinguiſhed and remembered for gallant actions; a love of juſtice; and a zealous attachment to their friends and their country. Such is the ſtrain of ſentiment in the works of Oſſian.

But the ſublimity of moral ſentiments, if they wanted the ſoftening of the tender, would be an hazard of giving a hard and ſtiff air to poetry. It is not enough to admire. Admiration is a cold feeling, in compariſon of that deep intereſt, which the heart takes in tender and pathetick ſcenes; where, by a myſterious attachment to the objects of compaſſion, we are pleaſed and delighted, even whilſt we mourn. With ſcenes of this kind, Oſſian abounds; and his high merit in theſe, is inconteſtable. He may be blamed for drawing tears too often from our eyes; but that he has the power of commanding them, I believe no man, who has the leaſt ſenſibility, will queſtion. The general character of his poetry, is the heroic mixed with the elegiac ſtrain; admiration tempered with pity. Ever fond of giving, as he expreſſes it, "the joy of grief," it is viſible, that on all moving ſubjects, he delights to exert his genius; and accordingly, never were there finer pathetick ſituations, than what his works preſent. His great art in managing them, lies in giving vent to the ſimple and natural emotions of the heart. We meet with no exaggerated declamation; no ſubtile refinements on ſorrow; no ſubſtitution of deſcription in place of paſſion. Oſſian felt ſtrongly himſelf; and the heart when uttering its native language

guage never fails, by powerful ſympathy, to affect the heart. A great variety of examples might be produced. We need only open the book to find them every where. What, for inſtance, can be more moving, than the lamentations of Oithona, after her misfortune? Gaul, the ſon of Morni, her lover, ignorant of what ſhe had ſuffered, comes to her reſcue. Their meeting is tender in the higheſt degree. He propoſes to engage her foe, in ſingle combat, and gives her in charge what ſhe is to do, if he himſelf ſhall fall. "And ſhall the daughter of Nuäth live, ſhe replied with a burſting "ſigh? Shall I live in Tromathon, and the ſon of Morni low? "My heart is not of that rock; nor my ſoul careleſs as that ſea, "which lifts its blue waves to every wind, and rolls beneath the "ſtorm. The blaſt, which ſhall lay thee low, ſhall ſpread the "branches of Oithona on earth. We ſhall wither together, ſon of "car-borne Morni! The narrow houſe is pleaſant to me; and the "grey ſtone of the dead; for never more will I leave thy rocks, ſea-"ſurrounded Tromathon!——Chief of Strumon, why cameſt thou "over the waves to Nuäth's mournful daughter? Why did not I "paſs away in ſecret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair "head unſeen, and ſtrews its withered leaves on the blaſt? Why "didſt thou come, O Gaul! to hear my departing ſigh?——O had "I dwelt at Duvranna, in the bright beams of my fame! Then "had my years come on with joy; and the virgins would bleſs my "ſteps. But I fall in youth, ſon of Morni, and my father ſhall "bluſh in his hall *."

Oithona mourns like a woman; in Cuchullin's expreſſions of grief after his defeat, we behold the ſentiments of a hero, generous but deſponding. The ſituation is remarkably fine. Cuchullin, rouzed from his cave, by the noiſe of battle, ſees Fingal victorious in the field. He is deſcribed as kindling at the ſight. "His hand "is on the ſword of his fathers; his red-rolling eyes on the foe. "He thrice attempted to ruſh to battle; and thrice did Connal ſtop "him;" ſuggeſting, that Fingal was routing the foe; and that he ought not by the ſhow of ſuperfluous aid, to deprive the king of any part of the honour of a victory, which was owing to him alone.

* P. 244, 245, 248.

Cuchullin

Cuchullin yields to this generous ſentiment; but we ſee it ſtinging him to the heart with the ſenſe of his own diſgrace. "Then, "Carril, go, replied the chief, and greet the king of Morven. "When Lochlin falls away like a ſtream after rain, and the noiſe "of the battle is over. Then be thy voice ſweet in his ear, to "praiſe the king of ſwords. Give him the ſword of Caithbat; for "Cuchullin is worthy no more to lift the arms of his fathers. But, "O ye ghoſts of the lonely Cromla! Ye ſouls of chiefs that are no "more! Be ye the companions of Cuchullin, and talk to him in "the cave of his ſorrow. For never more ſhall I be renowned "among the mighty in the land. I am like a beam that has ſhone: "Like a miſt that has fled away; when the blaſt of the morning "came, and brightened the ſhaggy ſide of the hill. Connal! Talk "of arms no more: Departed is my fame. My ſighs ſhall be on "Cromla's wind; till my footſteps ceaſe to be ſeen. And thou, "white-boſomed Bragela! mourn over the fall of my fame; for "vanquiſhed, I will never return to thee, thou ſun-beam of Dun-"ſcaich *!

——————————Æſtuat Ingens
Uno in corde pudor, luctuſque, & conſcia virtus.

Beſides ſuch extended pathetick ſcenes, Oſſian frequently pierces the heart by a ſingle unexpected ſtroke. When Oſcar fell in battle, "No father mourned his ſon ſlain in youth; no brother, his bro-"ther of love; they fell without tears, for the chief of the people "was low †." In the admirable interview of Hector with Andromache, in the ſixth Iliad, the circumſtance of the child in his nurſe's arms, has often been remarked, as adding much to the tenderneſs of the ſcene. In the following paſſage relating to the death of Cuchullin, we find a circumſtance that muſt ſtrike the imagination with ſtill greater force. "And is the ſon of Semo fallen? "ſaid Carril with a ſigh. Mournful are Tura's walls, and ſorrow "dwells at Dunſcaich. Thy ſpouſe is left alone in her youth; the "ſon of thy love is alone. He ſhall come to Bragela, and aſk her "why ſhe weeps. He ſhall lift his eyes to the wall, and ſee his "father's ſword. Whoſe ſword is that? he will ſay; and the

* P. 60. † P. 182.

"ſoul

" ſoul of his mother is ſad *." Soon after Fingal had ſhewn all the grief of a father's heart for Ryno, one of his ſons, fallen in battle, he is calling, after his accuſtomed manner, his ſons to the chace. " Call," ſays he, " Fillan and Ryno—But he is not here—My " ſon reſts on the bed of death †."—This unexpected ſtart of anguiſh, is worthy of the higheſt tragic poet,

> If ſhe come in, ſhe'll ſure ſpeak to my wife—
> My wife! my wife—What wife?—I have no wife—
> Oh inſupportable! Oh heavy hour!
>
> *Othello*, Act. 5. Scene 7.

The contrivance of the incident in both poets is ſimilar; but the circumſtances are varied with judgment. Othello dwells upon the name of wife, when it had fallen from him, with the confuſion and horror of one tortured with guilt. Fingal, with the dignity of a hero, corrects himſelf, and ſuppreſſes his riſing grief.

The contraſt which Oſſian frequently makes between his preſent and his former ſtate, diffuſes over his whole poetry, a ſolemn pathetick air, which cannot fail to make impreſſion on every heart. The concluſion of the ſongs of Selma, is particularly calculated for this purpoſe. Nothing can be more poetical and tender, or can leave upon the mind, a ſtronger, and more affecting idea of the venerable aged bard. " Such were the words of the bards in the days of the " ſong; when the king heard the muſic of harps, and the tales of " other times. The chiefs gathered from all their hills, and heard " the lovely ſound. They praiſed the voice of Cona ‡; the firſt " among a thouſand bards. But age is now on my tongue, and my " ſoul has failed. I hear, ſometimes, the ghoſts of bards, and learn " their pleaſant ſong. But memory fails on my mind; I hear the " call of years. They ſay, as they paſs along; why does Oſſian " ſing? Soon ſhall he lie in the narrow houſe, and no bard ſhall " raiſe his fame. Roll on, ye dark-brown years! for ye bring no " joy in your courſe. Let the tomb open to Oſſian, for his ſtrength " has failed. The ſons of the ſong are gone to reſt. My voice re-

* P. 152. † P. 81. ‡ Oſſian himſelf is poetically called the voice of Cona.

" mains, like a blaſt, that roars lonely on a ſea-ſurrounded rock, af-
" ter the winds are laid. The dark moſs whiſtles there, and the
" diſtant mariner ſees the waving trees *."

Upon the whole; if to feel ſtrongly, and to deſcribe naturally, be the two chief ingredients in poetical genius, Oſſian muſt, after fair examination, be held to poſſeſs that genius in a high degree. The queſtion is not, whether a few improprieties may be pointed out in his works; whether this, or that paſſage, might not have been worked up with more art and ſkill, by ſome writer of happier times? A thouſand ſuch cold and frivolous criticiſms, are altogether indeciſive as to his genuine merit. But, has he the ſpirit, the fire, the inſpiration of a poet? Does he utter the voice of nature? Does he elevate by his ſentiments? Does he intereſt by his deſcriptions? Does he paint to the heart as well as to the fancy? Does he make his readers glow, and tremble, and weep? Theſe are the great characteriſticks of true poetry. Where theſe are found, he muſt be a minute critic indeed, who can dwell upon ſlight defects. A few beauties of this high kind, tranſcend whole volumes of faultleſs mediocrity. Uncouth and abrupt, Oſſian may ſometimes appear by reaſon of his conciſeneſs. But he is ſublime, he is pathetick, in an eminent degree. If he has not the extenſive knowledge, the regular dignity of narration, the fulneſs and accuracy of deſcription, which we find in Homer and Virgil, yet in ſtrength of imagination, in grandeur of ſentiment, in native majeſty of paſſion, he is fully their equal. If he flows not always like a clear ſtream, yet he breaks forth often like a torrent of fire. Of art too, he is far from being deſtitute; and his imagination is remarkable for delicacy as well as ſtrength. Seldom or never is he either trifling or tedious; and if he be thought too melancholy, yet he is always moral. Though his merit were in other reſpects much leſs than it is, this alone ought to entitle him to high regard, that his writings are remarkably favourable to virtue. They awake the tendereſt ſympathies, and inſpire the moſt generous emotions. No reader can riſe from him, without being warmed with the ſentiments of humanity, virtue and honour.

* P. 217.

Though

Though unacquainted with the original language, there is no one but muſt judge the tranſlation to deſerve the higheſt praiſe, on account of its beauty and elegance. Of its faithfulneſs and accuracy, I have been aſſured by perſons ſkilled in the Galic tongue, who from their youth, were acquainted with many of theſe poems of Oſſian. To transfuſe ſuch ſpirited and fervid ideas from one language into another; to tranſlate literally, and yet with ſuch a glow of poetry; to keep alive ſo much paſſion, and ſupport ſo much dignity throughout, is one of the moſt difficult works of genius, and proves the tranſlator to have been animated with no ſmall portion of Oſſian's ſpirit.

The meaſured proſe which he has employed, poſſeſſes conſiderable advantages above any ſort of verſification he could have choſen. Whilſt it pleaſes and fills the ear with a variety of harmonious cadences, being, at the ſame time, freer from conſtraint in the choice and arrangement of words, it allows the ſpirit of the original to be exhibited with more juſtneſs, force, and ſimplicity. Elegant however, and maſterly as Mr. Macpherſon's tranſlation is, we muſt never forget, whilſt we read it, that we are putting the merit of the original to a ſevere teſt. For, we are examining a poet, ſtripped of his native dreſs; diveſted of the harmony of his own numbers. We know how much grace and energy the works of the Greek and Latin poets receive from the charm of verſification in their original languages. If then, deſtitute of this advantage, exhibited in a literal verſion, Oſſian ſtill has power to pleaſe as a poet; and not to pleaſe only, but often to command, to tranſport, to melt the heart; we may very ſafely infer, that his productions are the offſpring of true and uncommon genius; and we may boldly aſſign him a place among thoſe, whoſe works are to laſt for ages.

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